INDIE AESTHETIC:
A PATHWAY TOWARDS THE THEORISATION OF EMOTION AND AFFECT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INDEPENDENT CINEMA

by

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"As much as you must strive for individual greatness, and strive you must, for it won't come to you of its own accord, you must also remember that there is no individual stronger than the collective."

These profound words were expressed by Reginald Hargreeves to his seven children in the 2019 television series *The Umbrella Academy*. His resonating counsel continued to echo through my TV screen, as I sat back on the couch in deep thought. Suddenly overcome with emotion, I began to recall my academic journey in the last four years: *it has not been smooth sailing,* I mused. Through the course of my research programme nonetheless, I was motivated and encouraged; and through my scholarly adventure, it was *the collective* who truly saw me through to the finish line. Indeed, the ties that bound us together, be they professionally or personally, made me stronger than I was alone. I would like to thank the collective, as many of them I can.

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The draft of my thesis was read by David Harris and Mark Collins, I was in awe of their comments. I dwelled confined in my diffidence regarding my work, but they helped me understand that to strive for greatness, one must be willing and open to sharing their work with others. Their ceaseless assistance was of great impact to my motivation and fortitude. Indeed, no man is an island! I would also like to extend my gratitude to my assistant supervisor, Cat Lester as well as the head of the film department, Dr John Fagg for their support, particularly at the final stage of my thesis.

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ABSTRACT|

This thesis combines an interest in film theory and philosophy to explore the multifaceted nature of the identity of contemporary American cinema. American independent cinema, specifically, has historically been viewed in terms of its contrast to Hollywood cinema, particularly in terms of narrative and stylistic differences. American independent cinema has evolved over the years, however—particularly since the emergence of 'Indiewood', and more recently, the rise in digital streaming platforms—thereby complicating the categorisation of films within the previously distinct cinema identities.

How then can contemporary independent cinema be understood, and what useful distinctions can be drawn between its identity and that of Hollywood? How can such distinctions be drawn? To answer these questions, the thesis aims to explore how the concept of Cognitive Film Theory can be understood in relation to the identity of cinema, specifically though cinema's components, such as storytelling, narrative structure, aesthetics, and ideology. The thesis aims to showcase how Cognitive Film Theory—through the notions of Emotion and Affect—can serve as a useful way of understanding independent cinema in contemporary discourse. What does an engagement with film through the concepts of emotion and affect tell us about: (a) the way meaning is offered by the filmmaker, (b) the way films can be interpreted by an audience and (c) the cultural significance of such interpretations that ultimately serve to strengthen the identity of a specific cinema (d) how we might theorise emotion and affect in independent cinema, based on our understanding of a–c?

As the thesis begins to explore these questions across several chapters, it gradually guides the reader through some of the key issues and concepts in film studies. It also traces the historical developments of independent cinema and introduces some key films. The thesis also highlights key arguments surrounding the independent label and then moves to explore methods through which we might theorise the concepts of Emotion and Affect in contemporary independent cinema. The thesis does this as a way of asserting that through an in-depth exploration of Emotion and Affect—and through key components such as storytelling, narrative structure, aesthetics (including sound, editing, lighting), emotional engagement and ideology (including cultural and political representations) we can understand independent cinema in contemporary discourse.

By exploring the roles that Cognitive Film Theory plays in the perception, understanding and interpretation of films—through emotive and affective constructions in films—the thesis aims to make the argument that Cognitive Film Theory serves as the most effective way of differentiating 'indie' from Hollywood. The thesis investigates how, and to what extent,

cognitive psychology and philosophy can be utilised to analyse the cognitive mechanisms of film, and by extension, a broader understanding of cinema identity as a medium of expression.

Several key issues are addressed throughout the thesis. To begin with, the intricate nature and definitions of several key terms used in the thesis are explored. Descriptors such as 'Independent', 'Hollywood', 'Emotion', 'Affect' and 'Philosophy' are isolated as being of key importance. This serves the purpose of limiting the thesis' territory and avoiding any confusion to the reader. Furthermore, there are prospects that new definitions and approaches to understanding the way in which independent films can be understood, will be proffered by the end of the thesis. It is therefore crucial to distinguish working theories/definitions from newly proposed ones.

Much like Cognitive Film Theory, Ideology/ideological dimensions—as an approach to film studies—is shown to play a significant role in our understanding of film. Ideology is thence used as a framework in the thesis in two ways: firstly, it serves to highlight how ideological notions and perspectives can structure and influence our understanding and reading of film characters, themes, visual styles, and narratives. Secondly, it is adopted to showcase how ideological frameworks (such as gender, class, and political ideology) influence the way emotion and affect function in film. A range of theories, theorists and scholars are presented in this thesis—from the notion of cognitivism to formalism—through the works of Gilles Deleuze, Sigmund Freud, André Bazin, Noël Burch, Jeffrey Sconce, Carl Plantinga, and several others.

A key feature of the thesis includes a literature review which covers a wide range of concepts, theories, and issues in film studies. The thesis includes an in-depth discussion of contemporary American film industry and significant changes within the industry over the years. There are chapters which focus on both Independent and Hollywood cinema as well as Cognitive Film Theory. The thesis employs both independent and Hollywood case studies films, some of which are well established within film criticism. It also proposes new case study films in order to both demonstrate developments within American filmmaking and to establish the ways in which emotion and affect are offered in various film texts. In exploring film analysis, the thesis provides both vibrant and crucial illustrations, along with key terms so that the reader can be fully immersed in the thesis' exploration of film.

Each chapter is written to explore specific subjects, such as 'The Independent Film Culture', 'Concepts of Representation in Independent Cinema' and 'Emotional Sustainability in Films Directed by Nick Cassavetes'. A wide range of films are analysed and discussed in varying degree, and within the context of aesthetics, representation, ideology, emotion, and affect.

Finally, suggestions are made in the thesis' conclusion for further research, reading and viewing, along with a comprehensive list of bibliography and filmography. The concluding chapter of the thesis offers a foundation for further research. It proposes that a new study could contextualise the viewing experience of film through the lens of political ideology. It would undoubtedly prove useful to explore how *outside forces* and institutions play a significant role in the audience's interpretation of film. In other words, how could contemporary political culture be effective in shaping the emotional and affective experience of film (a process that would occur outside of the realms of the formal devices employed in a film, and outside the boundaries of the affective experiences within a cinematic space)?

The thesis will hopefully inspire other researchers in Film Studies by broadening approaches to interpreting films as well as deepening the understanding of cinema identity and representation through theoretical concepts. Such concepts highlight how an engagement with psychology, ideology and philosophy can serve as governing tools for identifying, understanding, interpreting, and valuing film texts.

Section One|

Thesis Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology

CHAPTER ONE: THESIS INTRODUCTION|

While the line between Hollywood and Independent films continues to be blurred both economically and aesthetically, it has become increasingly important to examine the differentiating factors between both systems of production. This is because recognising the distinction between independent and Hollywood cinema fosters a deeper appreciation for artistic vision, cultural criticism, and critical engagement in contemporary discourse. It also helps with identifying audience engagement and tracking film culture. Both cinemas have historically had specific approaches to filmmaking and have catered to diverse audiences. An exploration into what those differences are will prove useful in understanding the characteristics, criticisms, and cultural influence of American contemporary cinema.

Therefore, in order to truly appreciate the diversity, intricacy, and richness of the cinematic landscape, we must first understand the cultural and artistic significance of cinema and how meaning if offered through themes, narrative, visual style and other filmic elements while also acknowledging the different purposes, audiences, and cultural contexts that shape these distinct realms of filmmaking. An examination of the emotive and affective qualities in independent films will offer a means through which such differences can be understood, and why they are relevant today. This thesis will use the term "the emotion system" in reference to both the emotive and affective human experience because it encompasses the various forms that both concepts adopt. It is not to suggest that the concepts of emotion and affect are interchangeable, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.3. The concepts of emotion and affect manifest in different ways across film texts; it could be by way of their quality in film texts; an engagement through, with, or by both concepts in film texts; or an emotive or affective response to the structure and organisation of a film.

In the last 40 years at least, American independent films have undoubtedly gained a lot of attention from filmgoers and scholars; with several academic literature being published on the subject. However, the emotion system and experiences derived from such films—through the aesthetic choices adopted by filmmakers—have remained under-researched, particularly in comparison to the emotive and/or affective experiences derived through the aesthetic choices of its Hollywood counterpart. Publications such as Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (2004), Veronica Pravadelli's *Classic Hollywood: Lifestyles and Film Styles of American Cinema* (2014) and Todd Berliner's *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema* (2017) have all offered assessments, albeit in limited capacity, of how the films within Hollywood provide aesthetic pleasure to, and elicit emotional

responses from, an audience. This is perhaps due to the limitations posed by the subject itself. As Carl Plantinga notes, emotional response "like the brain, is as yet only poorly and/or partially understood" (Plantinga, 2009: 221). Furthermore, "emotion and affect lie at the heart of spectator psychology and the aesthetic, rhetorical, and cultural importance of the media" (Plantinga, 2009: 221). These factors raised by Plantinga will continue to be highlighted in this thesis in order to reiterate the limitations of this line of study as well as to help the reader to understand the psychology behind emotive and affective capabilities in—and responses to— film.

There have been pioneering works on cognitive film theory by film scholars such as David Bordwell in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996), along with other publications on the subject, such as Ed S. Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (1995), Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (1995), Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith's *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (1999) and the later works of scholars such as Bernard Perron (*Cinema and Cognition*, 2002). Bordwell argues that in order to understand "cognitive analysis" as well as an audience's cognitive response to films, it is important to first analyse film techniques and formal elements/formalist styles in film such as composition, editing, sound design, and narrative structure (Bordwell, 1996: 122). Tan discusses the mechanisms of emotion and argues that they do not merely exist through narrative but are consciously constructed by the film. He adds that the audience undergoes a series of emotional states in form of *emotional trajectories* which are informed by the formal elements/formalist styles of filmmaking (Tan, 1995: 45).

In Murray's book, he explores the cognitive and psychological processes that bring about emotional engagement in film. Crucially, he argues that the audience engages with characters on screen through their own lived experiences. These experiences as he explains, are often shaped by their ideology, culture, and emotional disposition (Murray, 1995: 110). Much like Murray, Plantinga approaches cognitive film theory by examining the way cognitive processes—such as memory, pattern recognition and inference-making—help the audience to understand film texts. He noted that cinematic techniques are usually constructed and manipulated for the purpose of shaping the audience's perception and eliciting specific emotional responses.

In general, the above-mentioned books explore the cognitive processes of film interpretation and the emotional appeal of cinema. They also investigate the relationship between genre and emotion and examine how techniques such as film narrative and music are used to elicit emotion. Additionally, they examine the audience's identification with, and response to characters in film. However, in their exploration of case study films, there are no

attempts made to explore the way specific emotions are evoked by the aesthetic choices of specific cinemas. They also do not identify the ways in which emotions in film are suggested through a film's aesthetic expressions, visual storytelling, and narrative structure, or how the filmmaker structures and manipulates emotion through such components, and ultimately, how their analysis shapes the identity of specific cinemas.

Such limitations thus lead to the proposal of the following questions: Firstly, will the emotional response from an independent film, for example, differ from the emotional experience derived from a Hollywood film? How is emotion valued in film texts in the context of the identity of cinema? Secondly, are there differences between the emotive and affective experiences offered by independent films and Hollywood films, and in what ways are these differences relevant to cinematic discourse? Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, is the analysis of emotion and affect in film a suitable approach to discussing the identity of cinema? In other words, does exploring the concepts of emotion and affect through aesthetics serve as a useful way of distinguishing independent films from Hollywood films? These key questions will be the focus of this thesis and will be explored across several chapters.

To reiterate, the main purpose of this thesis is to theorise the concepts of emotion and affect within contemporary independent cinema which could potentially lead to a new understanding of the term. Consequently, the definition initially proffered in relation to independent cinema will serve to highlight the established literature, culture, and evolution within the cinema. Furthermore, it will help in limiting the territory of the subject area as well as avoiding any confusion. It is also important to note that although this thesis adopts specific definitions for terms such as independent cinema, there are no conjectures made that there are relatively neat and easy distinctions to be drawn between Hollywood and Independent films as this is a line that is generally assumed to be potentially rather blurred—economically, but even aesthetically.

Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt argue in *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream* that, "independent and mainstream feature films are linked together on a sliding scale. Neither aesthetically, ideologically nor economically are they purely antithetical" (Holmlund 2005: 3). One important reason for this is that Hollywood too is hardly a homogeneous entity or style. For example, *Fight Club* (1999, David Fincher) is a product of 20th Century Fox, but its aesthetics and emotive qualities would seem intuitively to be very different from, for example, Paramount Pictures' *Forrest Gump* (1994, Robert Zemeckis). Arguably, this is due to the film's nonlinear narrative style, complex character construction and a film technique—described as "smart" and "funny" amongst critics such as

David Denby—which primarily serve to offer alternative emotions and interpretations to counter the "reactionary elements in the movie" (Denby, 1944: 52).

In discussing the early years of the independent film industry, Juan Suarez posits that from the 1980s, "independence came to have primarily an aesthetic, rather than an industrial meaning" (Suarez, 2007: 40). He further explains that the cinema "started to signify films that ventured into themes largely untouched by Hollywood, that assimilated the influence of the experimental and art traditions, and that voiced minority perspectives" (ibid). The term 'independent' as Suarez notes, is also used in the music world, to "designate alternative acts—especially punk and new wave bands—that rejected the standardized language of commercial pop, along with its circuits of advertisement and promotion, and relied on small labels […] for recording and distribution" (ibid). In a cinematic context, the term appeared to be filled with implicit and explicit hierarchies in the 1980s, where the aesthetic connotation of 'independence' was placed above the analysis of industry. Therefore, the label 'independent' as used in the 1980s was attributed to "a thematically unconventional film" (ibid), such as *Chan is Missing* (1982, Wayne Wang); *Stranger than Paradise* (1984, Jim Jarmusch); *The Trip to Bountiful* (1985, Peter Masterson) and *Down by Law* (1986, Jim Jarmusch).

It is noteworthy to highlight that the hierarchical approach with aesthetics extended to films such as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), which, although distributed by a major studio (Universal Pictures), was generally perceived by critics and audiences as an independent film, since it foregrounded and explored themes such as race and class—themes that were rarely showcased in Hollywood at the time. The film was deemed "culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant" by The Library of Congress, LOC, in 1999—labels and characteristics that were often reserved for independent films at the time. On the other hand, some independent films such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1985, Wes Craven) and Emile Ardolino's *Dirty Dancing* (1987), although financed by independent companies, were generally not recognised as independent films due to their reliance on genre.

Yannis Tzioumakis considers independent films as productions that support "alternative aesthetic, cultural and political ideologies" (Tzioumakis, 2012: 2). However, Holmlund and Wyatt suggest that "what constitutes an independent film is ill-defined and hotly debated" (Holmlund and Wyatt, 2005: 2). Many other scholars have taken into consideration what such films are independent *of* and *from*. For example, in terms of what such films are independent from, Emmanuel Levy notes that "ideally, an indie is a fresh, low-budget movie with a gritty style and offbeat subject matter that express the filmmaker's personal vision" (Levy, 1999: 2). An obvious problem with using this definition will be its exclusion of several independent films such as Joel Zwick's *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) from the analysis. At its core, the

definition fails to demonstrate what the film is independent *from*. John Belton (1994) suggests that 'independence' in film should be reliant on what the films are independent *of*.

It could be argued that *independence* is not necessarily associated with low-budget films with *gritty visual style and offbeat subject matter* as Levy (1999: 2) suggests but applies to any film that has not been financed, produced and/or distributed by a major entertainment conglomerate (Belton, 1994). Of course, this notion is also challenging as it would mean films such as Jason Reitman's *Juno* (2007), would not be considered an independent film (seeing as it was produced and distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures, a specialty label which relied financially on a major studio, 20th Century Fox) while excluding the film's style that departs from Hollywood's classical aesthetics. Moreover, there are further complications: the major conglomerates for film production—the Big Five—are Universal Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, Warner Bros., Columbia Pictures and Paramount Pictures (initially including Sony and 20th Century Fox while excluding Columbia Pictures to constitute the "Big Six" film studios). This means that films such as *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy (2001–2003, Peter Jackson) and *Gangs of New York* (2002, Martin Scorsese) were, at the time, considered independent film productions by some critics since they were produced by New Line Cinema and Miramax respectively.

However, questions arise about whether New Line Cinema and Miramax Films are independent companies, giving their affiliations with major conglomerates. New Line Cinema for example, was purchased by Turner Broadcasting System in 1994, and was merged with Time Warner in 1996. In 2008, New Line Cinema then merged with Warner Bros. (Variety, 2012). The latter studio also, was owned by The Walt Disney Company from 1993 to 2010 and was sold to Filmyard Holdings in 2010. BeIN Media Group also acquired stakes in 2016, and ViacomCBS was set to acquire minor stakes in 2020 (Variety, 2012). These changes in film studio control have further complicated the 'identity' of Independent Cinema in contemporary film discourse.

It is important to continue to highlight the complexities surrounding the term 'independent film' to understand the justification for contextualising its definition for the purpose of this thesis. Geoff King notes that:

> The 'independence' of American independent cinema, or exactly what kind of production qualifies for the term, is constantly under question, on a variety of grounds. At the same time, the independent sector continues to thrive and to maintain an identity that is distinctive, even if not entirely separable from Hollywood. (King, 2005: 1)

The most pressing question to be drawn from this argument though, is *why*? Why is it that despite the supposed blurred boundaries and constant shifts in what constitutes independent cinema—and indeed Hollywood cinema—that the independent system of production manages to maintain a distinct identity? What makes up this identity? What aspects of Independent's

identity are unchanging, and how exactly does it transcend film production and offered to the audience? Is this identity recognised by its audience and, if so, how?

Another crucial question posed by this thesis is the Vision versus Version argument which raises questions about contemporary independent films and if they are derived from the personal vision of the filmmaker (which would mean it characteristically falls under a set of ideas of what embodies the codes and principles of independent filmmaking); or whether such visions simply originate from a need, or want, to produce film (which would mean it coincidentally falls under an independent system of production). This question is particularly relevant particularly because *The Big Five* are today, primarily distributors of films whose actual production is largely handled by independent companies—either long-running entities— or labels created for (and dedicated to) the making of a specific film. This means that the budget for a considerable number of contemporary independent films is less than modest (the obvious intention here being output and commercial drive). This calls into question as to the motive with independent filmmaking and proposals from critics about how high budget independent films ought to be interpreted. Arguably though, these questions leave contemporary independent films open to, perhaps, unfair criticisms as they are seen as *betraying* the independent film movement.

When the semi-independent label was created in the blockbuster age of independent film productions with films such as *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991, James Cameron), the financial approach was not to generate funding independently but to use the influence of studios to secure distribution on a global scale. Hence, the majors would get a *piece of the cake* with little to no risks in terms of production cost (Hillier, 2001). This approach prompted criticism from independent producers such as Lloyd Kaufman (*Mother's Day* [1980]; *Dialing for Dingbats* [1989]) to argue that the independent label had been "corrupted" and had evolved into an "appendage" label (Hillier, 2006: 254)—a subsection of the major studios. Roger Corman, a highly influential figure in low-budget filmmaking techniques, also argued that "a true independent is a company that can finance, produce, and distribute its own films" (Hillier, 2006: 254). Consequently, many independent players believed that the independent label should not apply to films that have even a partial influence from the major studios.

Crucial questions remain, however: does commercial motivation in filmmaking—and hence the *version* of film output by film companies—eliminate personal *vision* for, and/or diminish the meaning of a film? Do such implications impact the way in which a film should be interpreted? Does this alter the overall experience of a film? These are key issues that perhaps indicate a way by which contemporary independent cinema can be defined and understood today. There are a couple of terms mentioned here that need to be defined in order

to delineate and limit the territory of this thesis, thus allowing for a seamless construction of arguments within the very specific range of ideas that are being proposed.

Firstly, for the purpose of this thesis, the term 'independent' will depart slightly from the common notion and definitions of the cinema. It will argue that aesthetically, culturally, and politically, independent cinema is a discourse. Since the definition, meaning and understanding of independent cinema are constructed through film studies and criticisms as well as through ongoing discussions, debates, and interpretations from socially authorised groups (such as filmmakers and academics), it means that there are diverse perspectives and interpretations of what constitutes independent cinema's identity. Tzioumakis notes that "numerous sub-groups within […] institutions have appropriated the term independent in order to achieve particular objectives as well as define the field" (Tzioumakis, 2006: 11). The Discourse approach is particularly important as it accounts for all different forms and expressions of independent filmmaking. In principle, the concept of cinema as discourse *solves* the problem of having to proffer a static or fixed definition of independent cinema for which there is none.

The concept of discourse is also well suited for approaching American independent cinema because it involves questions of power. That is, by approaching independent cinema through contextual analysis (social, political, and cultural contexts), power dynamics and cultural norms have been shown to shape the identity of independent cinema over the years. As a discourse also, independent cinema can be approached through: (1) historical analysis, which traces how independent cinema has been understood and defined over the years, (2) critical engagement, which focuses on the limitations of certain definitions and the implications of others and how they ultimately broaden our understanding of independent cinema and (3) reflexivity, which affords this thesis the opportunity to reflect on some critical ideas and assumptions in relation to independent cinema and consider how the proposed arguments about emotion and affect in film serve to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding independent cinema. It is important to note that when discussing film texts specifically, 'independent' will be used interchangeably with 'indie'. This must not be confused with the term 'indiewood' which will be explored in Chapter 2.1.

Secondly, the term 'emotional response' in this thesis, refers to the *expressive outcome* of an audience to a film, through the cinematic techniques and formal devices utilised by the filmmaker. That is, the way in which a viewer interacts with a film text through macro (e.g. genre, narrative) and micro (e.g. cinematography, sound, mise-en-scène) features. Stuart Hall notes that these features encourage an audience to take up a particular position—a particular point of view—to what they see. He emphasises the points of view—the attitudes and values—

that the audience is encouraged to adopt towards what they see (Hall, 1980). This thesis will argue that the subject of emotional responses relies heavily on form (how a film is made) and content (what a film is showing). This argument is buttressed by Bordwell (1996), and Tan (1995) as previously mentioned. It means that emotional response to film are not merely *by-products* of a film's narrative, neither are they realised through *passive reception* or *predetermined theoretical frameworks* onto films. Rather, they are as a result of active constructions and manipulations of and by the film itself. In a cinematic context, 'form' refers to the film's style, techniques and media used, and the ways in which the micro elements are implemented. 'Content' on the other hand, refers to a film's subject matter, or themes being depicted.

Emotional response in this thesis, also refers to the modes of engagement that film texts produce. As aforementioned, such modes could be through a film's use of micro and macro elements, underpinning all textual and contextual constructions. It could take the form of viewer identification with a particular character, or life event. Emotional response could also materialise through discussions of contentious issues, events, or themes, and also by way of challenging the viewer's assumptions, or confirming their world view. Lastly, it could be in the form of shocking the viewer, exciting them, angering them, manipulating them, or making them cry. These forms of engagement, as argued in this thesis, are often intricately linked. To reiterate, the term emotional response will deal with the expressive outcome of the audience, the interaction of elements within a film text and the interwoven modes of engagements that generate emotional responses.

For the purpose of this thesis, 'Hollywood' simply refers to the institution of Hollywood which includes aesthetic, cultural and commercial institutions. Aesthetic-wise, films can be considered as a work of art, and formal elements can be interpreted and categorised by genre. Culturally, Hollywood films represent and influence its context. There are also social and political aspects of Hollywood and as André Bazin notes, these aspects—as ingrained in such productions as Michael Curtiz's 1942 film *Casablanca*—showed "American society just as it wanted to see itself" (Bazin, 1957: 15). Historically also, Hollywood aesthetics have had cultural constraints, such as the emphasis on hetero-normative happy endings. Whether such constraints are still the cultural trend today are certainly debatable.

Commercial-wise, Hollywood is a profit-driven global industry, which includes all aspects of production, distribution, and reception. There is also an undeniable *commercial aesthetic* in the institution of Hollywood where viewing pleasure is transformed into a product that can be purchased. There is a commercial goal to produce films that drive movie ticket sales by appealing to the widest possible audience. There is also the element of spectacle where

award ceremonies (such as the Oscars) are implemented to increase Box Office success and promote *star power*. To study Hollywood cinema, this thesis argues that one must consider films through the lens of its history (star system, genre, auteurs and technological advances) as well as film analysis (form, content and interpretation). Steve Neale and Murray Smith note that:

> A complicating factor […] has been the variability of the terminology used to discuss the changes in Hollywood, and the assumptions, criteria, and periodization implicit in the terminology. Is the 'Old' Hollywood best described as 'classical'? Is the 'New' Hollywood most usefully described as 'post-classical', 'postmodern' (or neither)? Are the most revealing criteria industrial, institutional, or aesthetic? What exactly has changed since the 1940s? (Neale and Smith, 1998: xiv)

These are all questions that will be examined in the next chapter when exploring Hollywood cinema. Of course, Hollywood is also a literal place on the world map, located in Los Angeles, California. However, not all Hollywood studios are situated there. Hollywood is also the name of the mainstream film industry in the Unites States, although not all its industries are US-owned. These latter definitions are slightly redundant to the inquiry of this thesis, however, as the focus will be on Hollywood film aesthetics, that, again, encompass its post-classical history and analysis. Nevertheless, the significance of the question of location and ownership will be briefly explained in the next chapter.

'Audience' as utilised in this thesis simply refers to a group experiencing and engaging in *shared* meanings of film texts. Hall notes that an audience typically takes on positions of readings. This again, is an expressive outcome of a film text and an indication of the form in which its reception might take, which could be "preferred", "negotiated", "oppositional" or "aberrant" (Hall, 1980). (To expound on the idea of an audience engaging in shared meanings of film texts, the thesis will explore the concept of 'significant form' in Chapter 4.2). It is worth considering the term 'audience' against the term 'spectator' with the latter term referring to the individual experiences and personal meanings of a film text (Aumont, 2004). Employing the term audience in this thesis—rather than spectator—provides an insight into a collective sense of the meaning of the text, rather than individual and personal interpretations which is often conducive to the subject of reception studies. For the purpose of this thesis, 'audience' may also be used simultaneously with 'viewer(s)'.

In this thesis, the term 'cinematic discourse' encompasses scholarly discussions of issues, language, descriptions, analysis, and components of motion picture. This is because the exploration of cinema in a more general sense may not tell us about how cinema is used *discoursally* or discursively (two alternative adjectives used in relation to the key word 'discourse'). Hence, to posit a short definition for the purpose of limiting the discussion to cinema, discourse analysis may refer to the analysis of units beyond the chapter or to the text itself, either partially or wholly. However, it is important to remember film is a medium through

which cinema is fixed. This begs the following question: should the conceptions of discourse, and discourse analysis be extended beyond cinema itself? While important to think about, it should be noted that this thesis focuses on cinematic discourse within the realms of film as its medium.

The term 'emotional quality' for the purpose of this thesis refers to the contextual value placed on the emotional engagement and interpretation of a film text. Such attributes are qualitative because they have been internalised by the audience through cognition, and may include joy, sadness, anticipation, surprise, fear, or anger. For example, a macro feature such as a narrative could be strategically utilised in film, in conjunction with a micro feature such as sound, for emotional effect. The resulting emotional quality from a narrative-sound combination, where the film sequence visualises joy (such as a group of children playing in the park), in conjunction with the use of sad music—or a lament—could result in an expressive outcome where auditory information (music) has a greater effect on emotive appraisal than visual information (narrative). It is important to note that such an amalgamation of filmic emotions could result in the opposite outcome if used in the reverse, that is, where happy/upbeat music could diminish the sadness of a film's visuals. Thus, the 'quality' of the emotion in this configuration is in the expressive outcome by engaging with film text that utilises such combinations—as opposed to the specific emotion that each feature is eliciting, individually. It is therefore crucial to think of emotional quality as an equation—*Emotional Quality (Happy Narrative + Sad Music = Fear)*—rather than two separate expressions by way of the implied emotional meaning of each macro/micro feature. A qualitative imposition on film interpretation also provides an opening for film discourse through contextual analysis of the broader impacts of such qualities to cinema.

Lastly, for the purpose of this thesis, 'accurate representation' involves questions of the sufficiency of the notions of the emotional and affective qualities in film as accurate means of theorising cinema. Why does an accurate representation of independent cinema, and by extension, Hollywood cinema, matter? After all, the consensus amongst scholars—King, 2009; Perren, 2012; Staiger, 2013; Tzioumakis, 2013, and so on—is that the boundaries of both systems of production are blurred, economically and aesthetically. The thesis argues that it is important to foster discussions on what could or should be the factors that allow for the differentiation of one film industry from the other because such factors have an implication for how, when and what films are being produced, and for what audience. To restate, the thesis departs from the common arguments about the warped nature of independent cinema's identity in the contemporary age. It seeks to adopt, *discoursally,* emotion and affect within cognitive film theory as a new standard for which independent cinema could be defined and represented.

Of course, this thesis will continue to question whether the emotive and affective qualities in film are indeed, an accurate representation of independent cinema as well as Hollywood cinema through case studies and theoretical analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW|

The thesis now turns to existing literature on film theory, where the subjects of American Independent Cinema, Hollywood Cinema, Cognitive Film Theory as well as Philosophy have been explored primarily through research by film theorists. The overall objective of Section One, is to outline, rectify and clarify some methodological problems that may obscure our understanding of independent cinema and the boundaries the thesis wishes to explore in relation to the cinema, in conjunction with the notions of emotion and the abstract concept of affect. Hence, notable scholars such as Geoff King and Carl Plantinga stand as the theoretical foil for such outlines. With this framework in mind, Section One introduces independent cinema as a discourse and uses this approach as a foundation for an alternative means to discussing cinema identity and film theory through cognitive theory and philosophy.

Despite much pioneering works by film scholars in the 1980s and 1990s, independent film study as a field, took a direction that all but excluded significant attention to the emotion system in independent film. This perhaps owes to fact that by the late 1980s, there were a number of independent films that "did not follow the dominant format in Independent filmmaking" (Tzioumakis, 2013: 32) with films such as *Dirty Dancing* (1987, Emile Ardolino). With the rise in inconsistencies within the independent production system, scholars mainly, but not solely, focused on how independent films were marketed and distributed, a process which birthed the term 'indiewood'—which Geoff King (*Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema*) describes as "a blend comprised of features associated with dominant, mainstream convention and markers of 'distinction' designed to appeal to more particular, niche audience constituencies" (King, 2009: 2). Indeed, works on the aesthetic choices and emotional qualities of independent films tended to be covered either within token chapters in surveys of contemporary American independent cinema (such as Emanuel Levy's *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Cinema*, 1999); or through a focus on individual films (such as *Down by Law* [1986, Jim Jarmusch]) in Jill Nelmes' *An Introduction to Film Studies* (1996). Several other scholars such as Yannis Tzioumakis (*American Independent Cinema: An Introduction,* 2006) as well as Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (*Contemporary Independent American Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, 2005) make mention of the blurred lines between the aesthetic qualities of independent and studio films. However, neither the forms in which said blurred lines exist in the indie aesthetic, nor what role cognitive theory plays in such discourse is discussed in depth.

One recent work in cognitive film theory that may gesture towards a path forward, however, is Torben Grodal's book *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture and Film*

(2009). In the chapter 'Art Film, the Transient Body and the Permanent Soul', Grodal discusses the differences in films aimed at an *art audience* and films aimed at a *mainstream audience*. He notes that while art films are dominated by "transitory" storytelling, mainstream films mostly focus on "subjective" storytelling and a permanent conclusion (Grodal, 2009: 205). Grodal is making a distinction here between a film that seems to rely on audience interpretation and one that caters more overtly to its audience's expectations, so to speak. He further notes that "our ability to recall the past and to construct schemas [1]creates fields of more permanent meanings, and our ability to produce abstract concepts likewise gives rise to experiences that are beyond the transient level of concrete interaction" (ibid.).

Grodal explains that "the middle level of concrete (narrative) interaction [is usually avoided] in order either to evoke abstract or subjective permanent meanings, or to activate a 'lower level' of perceptual meaning, style" (Grodal, 2003: 205). Hence, transitory storytelling is able to disrupt the conventional narrative by evoking emotions such as anticipation, suspense, and surprise and challenging the audience's assumptions about the progression of events within the film. In other words, manipulating the temporal structure, of a film allows the filmmaker to create emotional engagement through narrative tension, interest, and intrigue. On the other hand, subjective storytelling calls on the audience to inhabit the subject world and experiences of film characters. That is, by mirroring the audience's beliefs, values, and assumptions with that of film characters, the filmmaker is able to create empathy and emotional engagement between the audience and the film narrative.

Virginia Wexman also contributes to the concepts and modes of representation that characterise films as art, in *Film and Authorship*, stating that:

> Art-film narration goes beyond such codified moments of overt intervention. At any point in the film, we must be ready to engage with the shaping process of an overt narration. A scene may end in […] [creating] gaps […] that are not explicable by reference to character psychology, retardation may result from the withholding of information or from overloaded passages that require unpacking later. Lacking the 'dialogue hooks' of classical construction, the film will exploit more connotative, symbolic linkages between episodes. (Wexman, 2003: 43–44)

With Grodal and other similar efforts starting to redress the balance in the subject of emotion and affect in response to film, and with the space afforded, this thesis aims to make its own contribution to the field of independent cinema studies.

Crucially, the thesis attempts to provide a meaningful way of understanding and interpreting film texts using a philosophical framework. Bringing together works of scholars

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[1] Grodal suggests that schemas are cognitive structures that organise knowledge and guide perception by providing frameworks for interpreting sensory input. In a filmic context, the audience constructs schemas based on their lived experiences, socio-cultural background, an engagement with film culture and a knowledge of film conventions. These schemas therefore allow the audience to recognise patterns in film texts, anticipate and identify narrative developments as well as understand the visual language of cinema.

of film theory, cognitive film theory, psychology and philosophy, this chapter seeks to examine existing literature on American film industries, emotion and affect as well as philosophy, and consequently expand the ways in which cognition, in relation to film, is conceived. This chapter will be divided into four subject areas. Chapter 2.1 of the review will analyse the existing literature published on American independent cinema. Chapter 2.2 will highlight relevant literature on Hollywood cinema. Lastly, the thesis explores the relevant scholarly works on cognitive film theory from which the concepts of Emotion and Affect are derived in Chapter 2.3. In the growing bibliography addressing these concepts, Chapter 2 will begin to examine the various critical approaches that manifest in these various fields and will be explored even further, in later chapters of the thesis.

2.1. American Independent Cinema

Within a context in which the global conglomerates that control the major Hollywood studios increasingly emphasise the production of blockbuster remakes and films based on pre-sold properties and/or established franchises, it has often been argued that, by contrast, the loosely defined independent sector of American cinema produces original films that often push the envelope in matters of politics, aesthetics, representation, and cultural commentary. While American films produced independently of the major Hollywood studios have always existed, independent cinema started to become regularly used as a semi-coherent label in the early 1980s when a group of films financed and produced outside the Hollywood system managed to find some commercial success. From that moment on, independent cinema connoted a particular brand of *quality* filmmaking that was perceived as largely absent from Hollywood production.

It has generally been expressed by scholars that there is no watertight definition for independent cinema. Independent film producer Christine Vachon suggests that:

> While it [is] true that, in the best of all possible worlds, independent films are genuinely alternative visions, there [is] no such thing as an absolutely independent film. There [is] still an economy at work: The movie has to go into the marketplace, and people have to want to see it. (Vachon and Bunn, 2007: 2)

Additionally, Chris Holmlund notes that "what constitutes an independent film is ill-defined and hotly debated" (Holmlund in Holmlund and Wyatt, 2005: 2). This is because throughout the history of American cinema, the term *independent* has been used by a significant number of film-related institutions—such as film critics, production and distribution companies, filmmakers, the trade press, film academics and the film-going public—to describe an often-divergent set of filmmaking practices. As a result, the term 'independent' has been attached to

such diverse films as, *Gone with the Wind* (1939, Victor Fleming), *The Outlaw* (1943, Howard Hughes), *High Noon* (1952, Fred Zinnemann), *Hell's Angels of Wheels* (1967, Richard Rush), *Taxi Driver* (1976, Martin Scorsese), *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989, Steven Soderbergh), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez), *Lost in Translation* (2003, Sofia Coppola) and *Boyhood* (2014, Richard Linklater), all of which can be regarded as belonging in the same category of film (since they do not contain characteristics of the classical aesthetic of the mainstream American cinema in terms of narrative and visual style). These distinctions between both filmmaking practices have become increasingly difficult to state since films such as *Taxi Driver*, a seemingly independent film—in terms of its aesthetic choices—is in fact a studio film: controlled, financed, produced, distributed, and marketed by Columbia Pictures. With these issues contributing to the intricacy of independent cinema's identity, it is crucial to explore its ever-evolving definition to ascertain the terms through which the cinema may be defined in contemporary discourse.

2.1.1 Defining Independent Cinema

Noteworthy is the fact that independent films have been described differently over the decades. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Emmanuel Levy, in *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Cinema*, describes an independent film as unconventional, having a relatively low budget, and tackling themes and narratives that are usually not considered by Hollywood studios (Levy, 1999). Levy distinguishes between films that are economically independent from those that are artistically independent, hence, he emerges with two conceptions: one based on the financial aspect of indies, and the other based on their spirit or vision. The former conception suggests that any film financed outside Hollywood is independent, while the latter proposes that independent films are determined by their fresh perspective, innovative spirit, and the personal vision of and for the film. John Belton in *American Cinema/American Culture* (1994) echoes the sentiments of Levy's first conception, and he describes independent films in terms of what they are independent from. He suggests that the *independent* is any film that has been financed, distributed and/or produced away from the major entertainment conglomerate.

Greg Merrit too argues, in *Celluloid Mavericks: A History of American Independent Film* (2000), that the industrial realm is the most important part of any definition of independent cinema. He posits that it is also the most easily applied definition for some institutions, owning to the fact that there are different phrases of independent cinema—development, financing, production, and distribution—and therefore, different economic definitions inherently focus on

different phases. Like Belton, Merritt focuses on the financing and production phase, stating that an independent film is "any motion picture financed and produced completely autonomous of all studios, regardless of size" (Merritt, 2000: 4). Regarding the distribution of films, he argues that films made by smaller studios or given a guaranteed distribution by one of the major studios before production are classified as 'semi-indies'. His use of such a label highlights Levy's two conceptions of financing and personal vision. Hence, such productions—at their developmental stages—have relied on the independent principles, spirit, and vision thereby by-passing the influence of the studio despite such studios earning eventual distribution rights. Chris Holmlund, in *Contemporary Independent American Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (2005), also explores the subject of copyright and ownership. Crucially, he points out that independent films should be defined as films not distributed by the major conglomerates.

Several literatures on independent cinema, as aforementioned, begin with a discussion on its definition and then proceed with the delimitation of the scope of independent cinema. In this regard, Geoff King (*American Independent Cinema,* 2005) and Yannis Tzioumakis (*American Independent Cinema - an Introduction,* 2006) are worth mentioning. King maintains that the extent to which a film is independent varies in both form and degree. He discusses indies in three orientations: film financing, form, and the social issues they concern themselves with. He notes further that independent films vary in these three respects. Some films appear extremely radical, extremely low-budget, unconventional in narrative and containing sensitive political issues. Others have maintained a closer relationship with Hollywood. Hence, he states that:

> [P]rimarily in the sense in which they had been established in the wider culture in different trajectories, rather than according to a fix or literal definition; and the indies examined were either clearly independent or somewhere in the grey area which included studio-owned/affiliated 'specialist' or 'independent' labels. (King, 2005: 3)

The terms 'independent' and 'indie' have been used interchangeably in his book. This thesis will adopt this language too, particularly with its use of 'indie' when referring to films with an alternate stylistic approach.

Definitions seemed to shift by mid-2000s as Tzioumakis notes that the industrial background of film was no longer a relevant factor in its claim to 'independence'. Consequently, "questions of aesthetics […] assumed an increasingly prominent position in the discourse of contemporary American independent cinema" (Tzioumakis, 2006: 266). Tzioumakis' insight comes after an exhaustive discussion of the problems initiated by many approaches to defining independent cinema, hence, by choosing a discoursal approach to address the nature of American independent cinema he explains that:

> To account for all these different forms and expressions of independent filmmaking during the last hundred years, […] American independent cinema as a discourse […] expands and contracts when socially authorized institutions (filmmakers, industry practitioners, trade publications, academics, film critics, and so on) contribute towards its definition at different periods in the history of American cinema. (Tzioumakis, 2006: 11)

As noted in Chapter 1, this thesis adopts a similar approach in its exploration of independent cinema. To reiterate, the adoption of the concept of discourse directly addresses the issue of having to proffer an incontrovertible definition of independent filmmaking that simply does not exist in modern film criticism. More importantly, the concept of discourse involves the notion of power, where it is constructed by "socially authorised groups" as Tzioumakis (2006: 11) notes. Thus, there are parties who stand to gain through their association with American independent cinema (and through the exclusion of other parties or groups). The trade association for independent film and television industry—The Independent Film and Television Alliance (IFTA)—also contributes to the definition of independent films. In John Cones' *43 Ways to Finance your Feature Film: A Comprehensive Analysis of Film Finance* (2008), IFTA sets out an easily applied definition focused on how a film is financed, stating that a film should be considered as independent "if more than fifty per cent of its financing comes from sources other than the major US studios" (IFTA, 2008: 3). This approach lends credence to Tzioumakis' argument about the irrelevance of the industrial background of contemporary independent films, as such a criterion for *independent's* identity is an ever-receding provision of financial sourcing.

To briefly expand on one of the key issues previously raised in this chapter regarding the complexity of independent filmmaking practices; films such as *Taxi Driver* are perfect case studies for the issue surrounding the definition of independent cinema among scholars. In his 2013 book *Indie 2.0: Change and Continuity in Contemporary Indie*, Geoff King argues that:

> […] if the term independent is taken to mean any non-studio production in the history of American cinema, it runs the danger of becoming so inclusive as to be of little value as a specific analytical category […] On the other hand, it is important to be aware of the plurality of what has gone and continues to go by the term—as an operational category— and not to reduce this just to the confines of one model. (King 2013: 2)

Hence, King rejects an absolutist approach to categorising independent film productions. Holmund and Wyatt add to this point stating that while films like *Taxi Driver* may be seen as "associated with alternative points of view, whether they be expressed in experimental approaches or through crowd-pleasing comedies" (Holmund and Wyatt, 2005: 3), it is important to also remember that these elements do not generally characterise the independent approach to filmmaking seeing as there are several other independent films that work within the "straight-to-video" system (Holmlund and Wyatt, 2005: 3). As mentioned in the introduction, such a blend of features and hallmarks associated with independent cinema—

which also applies to films that are marketed towards a more traditional Hollywood audience—gave rise to the term Indiewood.

2.1.2. Indiewood: Commercially Committed Films

In 1999, *The Blair Witch Project* (Eduardo Sánchez, Daniel Myrick) an ultra-low budget independent film that initially cost $22,500, grossed about $140 million in the US Box Office, and $248.6 million, worldwide (Roscoe, 2000). Three years later, the $5 million independent production, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002, Joel Zwick), scored $368.7 million in the Box Office (Perren, 2004). This was almost as much in value as well-known blockbusters, such as Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) which grossed at $470.7 million (Murphy, 1975), along with his 1981 film *Raiders of the Lost Ark,* grossing at $389.9 million (Box Office Mojo, 2012). In 2004 similarly, Mel Gibson independently financed the film *The Passion of the Christ* (which as of December 2019 made approximately $611.9 million worldwide) and is ranked at number 46 in the Top 100 All-Time Box Office Blockbusters (Filmsite, 2019). Around the same period, independent filmmaker Jim Jarmusch had his 2005 film *Broken Flowers* breaking boundaries of its own. Shot over a $10 million budget, and featuring actor Bill Murray, the film went on to gross at $46.7 million in the box office, earning "more than the total gross of all of Jarmusch's previous films" (Badal, 2008: 13). The films mentioned above indicated a new era in independent cinema. The late 1990s saw a closer relationship between mainstream Hollywood and independent cinema, hence, the term 'indiewood' was coined.

Geoff King further describes indiewood as "an area [in independent production] in which Hollywood and the independent sector merge or overlap" (King, 2009: 1), and in *The Philosophy of Steven Soderbergh*, Steven Sanders and Barton Palmer note that:

> The Indiewood film […] customarily depends on a narrative form that proves easily understandable because of its dynamic plot and its engagement with genre. Providing a point of stability for the viewer, such a backbone can then be personalised with stylistic and thematic elements that render the film more idiosyncratic, less simple to interpret or appreciate to be sure, but not inaccessible. (Palmer and Sanders, 2011: 81–82)

The filmmaking practice is further discussed by Yannis Tzioumakis. He suggests that indiewood can be considered as a potential paradigm shift in independent filmmaking since it drives the production of "independent blockbusters" (Tzioumakis, 2013: 15). Often characterised as narratively accessible, star-studded, and with clear generic qualities, indiewood films commit to an increasing number of production and marketing funds for the creation of such films, to the extent that even the major studios from the late 1990s, made attempts at making films that were aesthetically "independent" (Tzioumakis, 2013: 15); as in

David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) and David Russell's *Three Kings* (2000); due to themes, and a marketing approach similar to the independent system of production.

Indiewood came to connote an era in independent film production in which films became increasingly difficult to distinguish from its mainstream counterpart. King further explains that indiewood was, and still is, used both negatively and positively by those involved in, or supportive of the independent sector. For the groups that adopt negative connotations, indiewood is "a way of marking off certain types of cinemas deemed too close to the activities of the studios to be deserving of the label 'independent'" (King, 2009: 4). Conversely, positive inferences suggest "an upsurge of more creative filmmaking that has found space inside, or on the edge of, the Hollywood system" (King, 2009: 4). King adds that the latter description suggests a return to the "[Hollywood] Renaissance [period in which] a number of less conventional, sometimes more challenging films were produced or distributed within the confines of the major studios" (King, 2009: 4). An even more positive implication for indiewood is given by John Schamus. In reference to independent blockbusters, he posits that:

> The successful integration of the independent film movement into the structures of global
> media and finance has wrought untold benefits to American filmmakers and has resulted
> in the making and distribution of some of the greatest works of cinema art to come along
> in a long time. (Schamus, 2001: 254)

He stresses that the integration is particularly important as there are many challenging films with few opportunities to be seen due to production costs.

As the conception of indiewood continued to gain traction within the discourse of independent cinema, studios like Miramax gradually shifted to the production of bigger budget films (Perren, 2001), such as *Bounce* (2000, Don Roos) which had a budget of $36 million. This trend, Tzioumakis notes, led to a "third wave" (Tzioumakis, 2012: 17) of classics divisions (now commonly referred to as the specialty labels). In the following decade, small distributors collapsed, and newer, better-capitalised ones began to assert their position in the industry (Tzioumakis, 2012). These included distributors such as Artisan (1997–2002); USA Films (1998–2001) and Newmarket Films (2000–2005) which crumbled amid the industrial change. Studios that witnessed growth included Fox Searchlight Pictures (now known as Searchlight Pictures since Disney's acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019 {1995–present}); Paramount Classics (later changed to Vantage {1998–2009}); Warner Independent Pictures (2003–2008); Picturehouse (2005–2008); Screen Gems' film division (1998–present); United Artists (1999–present) and Focus Features (2002–present). It is noteworthy here to mention a point highlighted by King that indiewood "can have slightly different implications […] when used to characterise the qualities of individual texts rather than the institutional realm of the specialty divisions; the latter not being exclusively limited to the distribution of the former" (King, 2009:

5). Consequently, while the specialty divisions might seek to produce or acquire films for the purpose of achieving "cross-over beyond the restricted confines of the art-house market", at a textual level, indiewood is also used in identifying "examples in which such an aim or strategy appears to be bodied more fundamentally in the fabric of the production itself" (King, 2009: 5). This is perhaps the true nature of indiewood's identity: one that is classed as bridging conventions associated with Hollywood films with an extensive array of stylistic, narrative, and thematic approaches, developed in different cinematic traditions, with elements such as exploitation, art cinema and earlier expressions of independent cinema.

With the fusion of conventions and aesthetics associated with Hollywood cinema and "a range of distinctive alternatives" (King, 2009: 2), such as the art cinema and the avant-garde, indie films became more accessible and audience-friendly due to a familiarity in style, narrative and genre. Additionally, the exploitation of the film star element became more prominent during this era (King 2009). For the benefit of global reach, the marketing of such films meant that filmmakers would yield control to global distributors, in order to reach more theatres. As previously noted, Schamus suggests that this was a positive thing, adding that "even the 'little guys' need big capital if they are to survive in any economically viable form" (Schamus, 2001: 254). However, the need—whether wittingly or unwittingly—to make both production systems similar, both economically and aesthetically, continues to raise serious lines of questioning. Sherry Ortner comments on the issue, stating that "the culture industry is indeed very powerful, and [...] is it highly unlikely that a filmmaker can work within any kind of Hollywood-related or studio-type context and retain his or her independent spirit" (Ortner, 2013: 48–49). This indeed emphasises the ideas raised in Chapter 1 with regards to the *Vision versus Version* argument being rooted in a significant motive behind independent filmmaking.

To summarise the arguments posed by some of the scholars mentioned in this chapter; there seems to be an agreed conception that indiewood represents the *best of both worlds*, where binding elements in Independent and Hollywood cinemas promote an integrated campaign for films worldwide. There is also the perception that specialty labels have taken more risks this way, aligning therefore, with the principles of the power and scope of major studios. This does not underscore the arguments made by Ortner or other players in independent cinema such as producer Ted Hope, who in 1995, argued against such an integration and ponders on the state of *independence*:

> Although we celebrate our independent "spirit", the logic of the studio film—its range of political and social concerns, its marketing dictates, and even its narrative aesthetic—is slowly colonising our consciousness. The screens are controlled by the studios and sooner or later, every filmmaker winds up working for the studios. (Molloy, 2010: 28)

The commercial drive within the industry is as he notes, detrimental to its identity. Geoff Gilmore warned of this in *The State of Independent Film*. Writing in *National Forum*, he

expressed that if independent cinema "tries to sell itself simply as a product, independent cinema will lose those elements that made it effective and appealing. Artistic integrity, even when out of step with popular embrace, remains its true signature" (Gilmore, 1997: 13). These issues outlined serve as a further justification of the position taken in this thesis with regards to the identity of independent cinema; that aesthetically, culturally, and politically, 'independence' is a discourse. Crucially, as independent films continue to align in power and value with the principles of major studios, it is arguably essential to think discoursally—which, as mentioned previously, are produced, and validated by socially authorised groups—so as to proffer and align *independent*'s identity with broader concepts (emotion and affect) and ideologies (philosophy).

2.1.3. Contemporary Independent Cinema

The term 'Contemporary Independent Cinema' has been used very often in scholarly debates and in film theory and criticism. Of course, any notion of a *Contemporary* independent cinema will always be a discursive construction of a particular kind. Different critical accounts—such as works aforementioned from Emmanuel Levy (1999), Geoff King (2005), Richard Ferncase (1996), Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (2005), Yannis Tzioumakis (2012) and Sherry Ortner (2013)—have sought to describe changes in Independent filmmaking in the period from the 1980s to the present, and although these acts of criticism target an agreed period of American independent film history, they make different claims for the significant areas about said period. The result is that "contemporary independent cinema" does not remain the same object across its different critical descriptions. In other words, it encounters a series of competing accounts of 'the contemporary' in relation to independent cinema. The independent films of the post-1980 era, according to Peter Biskind in *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film*, "were anything Hollywood was not" (Biskind, 2005:19). These values are highlighted by Annette Insdorf where she describes the early years of contemporary American independent cinema as embodying elements such as "casting, pace, cinematic style and social and moral vision" (Insdorf, 1981: 58) with films such as *Return of the Secaucus 7* (1980, John Sayles) which was produced, marketed and distributed away from Hollywood studios. The use of unknown actors as opposed to *big stars* in film productions, as well as making use of "intimate canvasses […] with regional authenticity" as opposed to the use of "big studios" are all embodiments of post-1980 indies (Insdorf, 1981: 58). Ultimately, independent cinema's "geographically rooted directors resist[ed] Hollywood's priorities and

potential absorption" (Insdorf, 1981: 58) in order to create and maintain an alternative cinematic identity.

American independent features remained quite thin on the ground before the early 1980s. Geoff King argues however, that from the mid-1980s, the independent sector flourished for the next two decades (King, 2005). Both Levy (1999) and King (2005) seem to agree that the factors responsible for the development of indie films include considerations such as a greater demand for visual media, supportive infrastructure, conservative majors, and the increase in availability of investment capital. These factors, driven by an increase in the number of theatres and the popularisation of home video as a means of entertainment in the country created a general increase in demand for films that mainstream Hollywood studios were unable to meet. Noteworthy films such as *Stranger than Paradise* (1984, Jim Jarmusch), *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989, Steven Soderbergh)*, Reservoir Dogs* (1992, Quentin Tarantino) and many others, established the profile and impact of the indie sector. Some of the films mentioned here will be explored more deeply in Chapter 4 to explain the dynamic forces that exist within indie film culture.

2.1.4. The Netflix Factor

A crucial aspect in the evolution and identity debate of cinema is the exploration of the contemporary medium through which films are made available to audiences. This means a noteworthy mention of the Netflix phenomenon. Founded in 1997 (Pogue, 2007), the American media-service provider has, since 2016, expanded to "over 120 countries" (Barker and Wiatrowski, 2017: 1), with a model of using streaming video library to appeal to viewers worldwide. In recent years Netflix has prioritised the production and distribution of both film and Television series, which they have extended to the production of a variety of 'Netflix Original' content through their streaming library. The focus here, is not to explore the history, ownership, or other industrial aspects of Netflix, but to briefly comment on the movie classifications on its service. It particularly speaks to the complexities in defining the terms independent as well as Hollywood cinema.

On its online streaming platform, Netflix lists both indie and Hollywood film productions as genres under its film genre category.
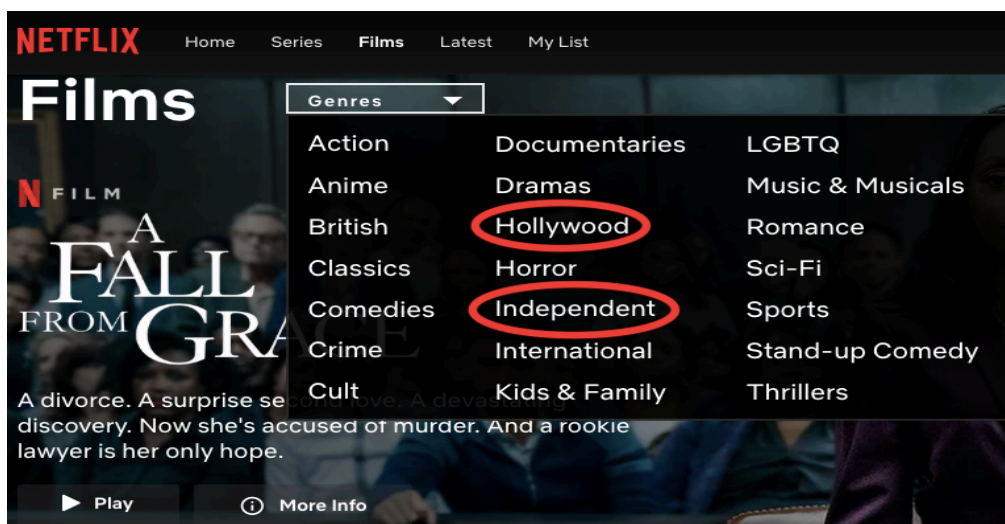
Figure 2.1.1 – Film Genres on Netflix, January 2020: Both Hollywood and Independent are listed as genres, as though the films within them exist autonomously from the films in other genre categories.

This implies that both Independent and Hollywood are genres themselves, with films that exist independently of other genres—such as comedy, horror, and drama—also being individually listed in this category. It is possible that the word 'genre' is adopted loosely by Netflix here and is used in more broad terms to encompass theme, style, and location. This is especially plausible since other 'genres' on this list include 'LGBTQ', 'International' and 'British' films.

Perhaps the main issue with Netflix's categorisation here is that these titles overlap—even more than usual (because quite evidently, no category is absolute in its genre identification and there will always be intersections, especially with films with multiple themes)—appearing as though they exist autonomously from each another. The table below highlights some films in Netflix's independent category as listed in January 2020. These include *Dumplin'* (2018, Anne Fletcher), *Call Me by Your Name* (2017, Luca Guadagnino) and *Ex Machina* (2014, Alex Garland) as independent films. Concurrently, three Netflix films *Bird Box* (2018, Susanne, Bier), *Downsizing* (2017, Alexander Payne) and *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017, Jake Kasdan) are listed in the Hollywood category.

Film	Genre	Sub-Genre (s)	Country	Director	Distributor	Budget
***Dumplin'* (2018)** N	Independent	Comedy Drama	United States	Anne Fletcher	Netflix	$13 million (Sperling, 2018)
***Call Me by Your Name* (2017)**	Independent	Romance	United States Brazil Italy	Luca Guadagnino	Sony Pictures Classics (International)	$3.5 million (Katz, 2018)
***Ex Machina* (2014)**	Independent	Sci-Fi Drama	United States United Kingdom	Alex Garland	A24 (United States)	$15 million (Gerber, 2015)

					Universal Pictures (International)	
Bird Box (2018) **N**	Hollywood	Thriller Horror	United States	Susanne Bier	Netflix	$19.8 million (CFC, 2018: 9)
Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle (2017)	Hollywood	Fantasy Action Comedy	United States	Jake Kasdan	Sony Pictures Releasing	$90–$150 million
Downsizing (2017)	Hollywood	Sci-Fi Drama Comedy	United States	Alexander Payne	Paramount Pictures	$68–$76 million

Table 2.1 – Key information regarding selected genred films on www.Netflix.com
("N" indicates that the film is a Netflix Original)

Of course, the budget habituation of independent films is very low in context, and in comparison, to Hollywood films, as evidenced by the table above. However, the films *Dumplin* and *Birdbox* are both financed by Netflix. This further complicates the identification of independent films even with such realities as the semi-independent label. In the case of the latter system, there are special divisions dedicated to the production of independent films. With Netflix however, the financial contributions to both labels are from the same source. This contemporary phenomenon of an integration of distributor and system of production further complicates the discourse on how independent cinema can be understood on an industrial level. Nevertheless, such complexities contribute to the broader argument about cinema identity as well as a need for a consideration of alternative concepts within film theory as a means of better understanding such identities.

2.2. Hollywood Cinema

For the purpose of this thesis, the scope of the exploration of Hollywood cinema will be limited to the years from 1980 to present day, purely to coincide with similar explorations of contemporary American independent cinema. As noted in the Chapter 2.1.3, the notion of a contemporary independent cinema will always be debatable, underwritten by certain markers as premise for such descriptions as *contemporary*. In the case of Hollywood cinema, this thesis will explore the aesthetic, socio-economic and political trends during the proposed period to determine what led to the emergence of independent cinema. Of course, this does not mean that a contemporary marker of Hollywood cinema is necessarily the same as in the case argued for independent cinema, or that the socio-economic and political trends gave rise to certain forms of filmmaking in the argued hallmarks emerging in each proposed era. It is simply to

assess *the other*, as a less significant, but crucial part of the discussion when exploring independent cinema. As such, this period cuts across two significant eras in Hollywood history — the 'New Hollywood' era as well as the 'Blockbuster' era are discussed by Thomas Schatz (2004), Jill Hillier (1993), Steve Neale (1998), Murray Smith (1998), Geoff King (2002), Yannis Tzioumakis (2012), Richard Maltby (2003), Jon Lewis, (1998, 2001), and many others.

It is generally agreed that the former era (the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s) marked the end of the classical era, and that the latter era encompasses the period from 1982 to present (Schatz, 2004: 25; McCrisken, 2005: 18). Hollywood, as Murray Smith notes, is a "multi-faceted creature" (Smith, 1998: 4) and cannot be simplified. Geoff King adds that "changes at one level are related to changes at another, but there is no guarantee that they match up tidily" (King, 2002: 2). He notes that Hollywood nevertheless "remains a business" (King, 2002: 2). Therefore, whatever argument is put forward about the changes to the industry "is regularly subjected to critical interrogation for what it tells us about the society in which it is produced and consumed" (King, 2002: 2). This means that a consideration must be made about what the cinema expresses and reflects about its time and place.

As noted in the introduction, Hollywood, for the purpose of this thesis, is taken to mean the institution of Hollywood which includes aesthetic, cultural and commercial institutions. These institutions embody several aspects including Identities (such as racial, cultural, and ethnic identities); Representation (such as gender and sexuality); Marketing (such as film budget and distribution) as well as Film and Ideology (such as politics and mass culture). As explained previously also, in order to study Hollywood cinema, it is important to explore films in terms of their history (star system, genre, auteurs and technological advances) as well as film analysis (form, content and interpretation). Steve Neale and Murray Smith explore these elements in their book *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. They question the possibilities of using these ideas as markers of different Hollywood eras. As noted previously, also, Hollywood is the name of the mainstream film industry in the Unites States, although not all these industries are US-owned. Hence Richard Maltby notes that "convergence and globalisation have resulted in the American film industry no longer necessarily being owned by Americans, although its product has, if anything, become more exclusively American in perspective" (Neale and Smith, 1998: 36). He adds that "globalisation and the new markets have made the majors increasingly stable, whoever actually owns them" (Neale and Smith, 1998: 37). These latter definitions are slightly redundant to the inquiry of this thesis, however, as the structures (aesthetic, political and socio-economical) within which film texts exist in Hollywood cinema will be the focus of this thesis.

2.2.1. The New Hollywood Era (1967 – 1982)

The period from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s was a time in American cinematic history, described as New Hollywood. It has also been described as *The Hollywood Renaissance* and *American New Wave*. According to Noel King, it was a "brief era in which the system introduced new cinematic aesthetics" (King, 2004: 20). Some years within this period, specifically from 1969 to 1975, have been described by David Cook in *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970–1979* as an "aberration"; a "richly fruitful detour in the American cinema's march towards gigantism and global domination" (Cook, 2002: xvii). As a discursive construction, King explains that New Hollywood Cinema emerged as a way of "linking the traditions of classical Hollywood genre filmmaking with the stylistic innovations of European art cinema" (King, 2004: 20). These were years of experimentation within this system of production as filmmakers took on a key authorial role, influencing the type of films produced, their production and marketing processes, as well as the major studios' approaches to these processes (King, 2004).

Geoff King in *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* adds that these films were a part of the studio system and introduced certain filmic elements such as fresh subject matter and a more flexible style of shooting, even though their directors were not "independent filmmakers" (King, 2002: 3). Within a social context however, King notes that New Hollywood is "less easy to define [because] there are overlaps between the industrial and social context" (King, 2002: 7). He explains that "reading films simply as reflectors of their times are fraught with difficulties and scope for misunderstanding" (ibid.). This is certainly true of the Hollywood Renaissance although it is a complex issue. Even as the need for change in Hollywood film productions was determined by the harsh economic landscape of 1970 in the country (Frum, 2000), it is not as straightforward to assume that there was also an underlying need for social change, although a case could be made to the contrary. This is because there is no clear-cut historical progression of what was allowed within the bounds of Hollywood expression and representation. For example, some films in the first decade of the Golden Age are more exploratory in their representation of sexuality than films from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s. King suggests that a reason for this was "less a reflection of social attitudes than of self-regulation provided by the industry's Production Code [....] a response to pressures from the society of the time, but only from particular sectors, notably the Catholic Church" (King, 2002: 8). Effectively, the Production Code was a proactive measure taken by the industry to prevent any further control by outside organisations. The resulting self-regulation that guided what

could be produced was in relation to the socio-historical context. Nonetheless, the practice was adopted by the industry and utilised in a rather arbitrary manner rather than as a rigid rule.

Described as the worst decade of most industrialised countries' economic performance since the Great Depression, the 1970s recession brought about low-rate economic growth, compared to previous decades (Frum, 2000). Nevertheless, William Paul (*Film Comment*, 1977), in discussing some of the reasons for the decline of Hollywood production values, posits that the changes were not very significant as the successes of "big films and big stars" continued to be front and centre in Hollywood, despite the equal successes of some "small films" (Paul, 1977: 62). The mark of authentication for the traditional Hollywood films of the 1970s (and indeed the decades since) was clearly mapped out: the films offered a narrative with a linear story based on character-driven action that unfolds in its theatrical space. This narrative, according to Richard Malby in his *Hollywood Cinema* usually featured an equilibrium-disequilibrium-new equilibrium structure with a style consisting of the 'classical' principles of literature and art with continuity editing (Maltby, 2003: 452). This was a continuation of the classical mode of filmmaking as identified by Bordwell et al in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1988; 2019).

By the late 1970s, Hollywood film production remained focused on films with commercial appeal; films based on bestsellers and hit plays, and films with big stars—which was a marketing strategy in itself as the stars generated their own publicity (Paul, 1977: 62). David Cook recalls that the "rapacious" commercially successful system of Hollywood, existing concurrently with an "aesthetically experimental socially conscious cinema d'auteur", was nothing short of a cinematic phenomenon (Cook, 2002: xvii). While these standards were symbols of 1970s cinema in American film history, he notes however that it was mainly an "illusion" (ibid.) to live by the notion of the co-existence of both systems, over a long period of time. Geoff King adds that:

> Aspects of Hollywood films such as authorship, genre and stardom can be separated out for purposes of analysis, but they often operate simultaneously across the space of any individual film and from one film or group of films to another. (King, 2002: 177)

He further explains that films can be read in various ways and operate "in different directions" (King, 2002: 177), arguing against the claim that there was a time in which Hollywood narrative was more "coherent" (ibid.). This argument, as he highlights, comes from the assumption that New Hollywood cinema, especially in relation to blockbuster is defined by a lack of narrative to the dimension of imagery. King argues that this is not the case, stating that such claims "are often based on an exaggerated assumption of the extent to which Hollywood movies were ever dominated by a commitment to classical narrative forms" (King, 2002: 180). Perhaps a significant line of questioning here would tend towards the conscious level *truly*

embodied by the Hollywood audience, about narrative functions, as well as what roles the narrative process play in the overall cinematic experience of the audience.

Possibly, King's argument about the *coherence* of narrative in film is steered in the wrong direction. His language use seems to apply to other filmic elements that seemingly distract the audience from the story, rather than the components of the narrative structure itself. As he argues, "the presence of stars is an example of a routine 'disruption' of a certain form of internal coherence" (King, 2002: 181). However, as David Bordwell and Richard Maltby argue, the narrative element in Hollywood films serves to enhance the pleasure of the cinematic experience and is not the purpose of it. Bordwell notes that in Hollywood films, "a specific sort of narrative causality operates as the dominant, making temporal and spatial systems vehicles for it" (Bordwell, 2019: 11). Maltby adds to this line or reasoning, stating that:

> Storytelling helps ensure that the movie can be consumed as a coherent event, but it holds no privileged place among the pleasures a movie offers. The story is part of the movie that holds its component parts together, sequences them, and provides an explanation or justification for that sequencing. (Maltby, 2003: 453)

This is not to dismiss King's sentiment about the relationship between big-name stars, spectacle, and narrative structure. It is to suggest that, perhaps, a better way to think of the presence of spectacle in film is that it delays the narrative progression of a film, rather than distract or interrupt the coherence of the narrative. Again, the point of the film is not the narrative, but the way in which the narrative serves as a tool to enhance the experience of cinema. The question of the film narrative is perhaps even more prevalent in the Blockbuster era of Hollywood, in an age where spectacular audio-visual effects and commercial interests have been said to undermine storytelling. This line of criticism will be explored momentarily.

By the early 1980s, while Hollywood continued to thrive on the world's screens commercially, the cinema of the great studio directors as well as that of independent-minded auteurs—like Dennis Hopper and Steve Spielberg—had entered its terminal decline. William Goldman, in his book *The Big Picture: Who killed Hollywood*, explains that aside from the differentiating factor or the industry that produced new event movies, the directors, style of filmmaking, as well as the funds that fuelled these productions were also different. It was also at this time that filmmakers, critics, scholars, and the press began discussions about the 'death' of cinema and raised questions about who 'killed' Hollywood (Goldman, 2000). These discussions were triggered by films like Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980) which was budgeted at $44 million but grossed at only $3,484,331 in the United States, leading to United Artists' bankruptcy (Epstein, 2004). Arguably, this heralded the period in which the *daring*, experimental, auteur cinema of the Hollywood Renaissance came to an end.

2.2.2. Independent Black Cinema and Blaxploitation Films

The New Hollywood Era is a particularly crucial period in Hollywood's filmmaking practices and history, as it produced the black independent movement. In an attempt to resist as well as bring about a change in the portrayal of black people in Hollywood films, the movement emerged in the 1970s. Scholars such as Tommy Lott (*Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, 1998), Josiah Howard (*Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide*, 2007), Ed Guerrero (*Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, 1993) and Novotny Lawrence (*Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre*, 2008) agree that the aesthetic and political nature of black films have been based on the "counter hegemonic practices" (Lott, 1998: 211) of Hollywood. It is important to note here that the *independence* sought by this movement was of representation, and not commercially driven, as most films made under this system were indeed financed by major Hollywood studios. Tommy Lott explains that although the films produced by this movement were in opposition to Hollywood, "they were also dominated by Hollywood's influence on black audiences" (Lott, 1998: 212).

The movement was produced by the 'blaxploitation film' genre between the 1970s and 1980s, a term which has been used both negatively and positively by various critics. While filmmaker Gordon Parks Sr. took offense to the term blaxploitation, and the categorisation of his films as such (Howard, 2007: 7), Lott argues for the commercial importance of the genre. He explains that the distribution of independently made blaxploitation films that did not "renege on the question of collective resistance represent[ed] a milestone in independent black filmmaking" (Lott, 1998: 213). Seemingly, Parks' contention with the label came about after his 1971 detective flick film *Shaft,* starring Richard Roundtree—and described as the "world's first black action hero" (Flynn, 2017: para. 5)—served to eradicate the damaging stereotypes of black people in America. *Shaft*, as opposed to prior black films "operated in tandem with the empowered self-expression of the black power movement as a no-holds-barred celebration of the black body" (ibid.). Indeed, the blaxploitation genre as studied in film criticisms and several literatures, often portrays a black hero or heroes, who have to overcome difficult circumstances in such ways that often involve the use of the qualities of gang culture, violence and intimidation, to achieve their goal. This thesis recognises the broad definition of blaxploitation, without suggesting any clear positive or negative connotations that should determine its meaning as a genre, or significance to the movement. That is, blaxploitation simply includes films that follow a black main character who serves as a catalyst for the exploration of specific subject matters such as slavery, socio-economic issues, drugs, and

crime. Such definitions also include an independent movement that strived for a positive *black* image.

Citing *Birth of Nation* (1915, David Wark Griffith), *Jezebel* (1938, William Wyler) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939, Victor Flemming), Lott notes that these films served as markers for "a pre-blaxploitation era, during which a mainstream image of black accomodationism and submissiveness prevailed" (Lott, 1998: 212). The era was later followed by a shift in the representation of *blackness* by way of the blaxploitation era which involved the "resistance and co-optation dominated by black action films employing strategic reversals of mainstream ideology" (ibid.). This was a major achievement, as Ed Guerrero pointed out at the time that "the film industry and the consumer imagination [were] not ready for any cinematic tale of slavery that stray[ed] too far from the framing confines of Hollywood's crude fantasies and exploitative strategies, be they hegemonic, revised, or reversed" (Guerrero, 1993: 40). He seems to suggest that blaxploitation films, though existing independently in content and subject matter, were driven by commercialism under the Hollywood system. This buttresses the argument made previously, that the type of independence sought by the Black movement was that of representation. Often referred to as the *plantation genre,* Guerrero notes that the release of *Gone with the Wind* and *Jezebel* saw a peak in "appeal and popularity" of the genre (Guerrero, 1993: 26). However, films like *Slaves* (1969, Herbert Biberman) and *Mandingo* (1975, Richard Fleischer) brought about a shift where the "plantation myth as a way of depicting black people […] collapse[d] and reverse[d] its ideological direction […]" (ibid.). Hence, this led to the "resistance and co-optation dominated by black action films" (Lott, 1998: 212) as earlier described by Lott.

By the 1970s, films such as *The Quadroon* (1971, Jack Weis) and *Drum (*1976, Steve Carver) were released as "part of an overall Hollywood strategy to recover from economic crisis by producing the Blaxploitation genre for inner-city audiences, where blacks dominated ticket sales" (Guerrero, 1993: 31). Guerrero adds that "what Hollywood found itself doing by the early 1970s was mediating two distinct currents of social thought on race, for two separate audiences" (ibid.). Therefore, films with "thematic emphasis on black confrontation, or victory over, white oppression" were targeted towards inner city audiences while "vigilante films" were favourable with white suburban audiences (ibid.). Arguably, *black* films produced in the 1970s became an essential point of blaxploitation filmmaking and was a direct metaphor to the black independent movement where black characters began to *fight back*. This is exemplified in films such as *Superfly* (1972, Gordon Parks Jr.) and Black *Caesar* (1973, Larry Cohen) that sees black characters seemingly having a lack of respect for authority and an utter disregard

for formalism and political correctness, while substituting diplomacy and niceties for brashness and violence to solve their problems.

The function of the independent black movement is arguably redundant today. Lott argues that "the notions of contemporary black cinema that rely on too rigid a dichotomy between independent and studio films are unable to accommodate recent developments in the film industry" (Lott, 1998: 211). He adds that these developments make it difficult to "ignore the fact that in the closing years of [the 1990s] there [was] less disparity between the film practices of the black independents and black filmmaking in Hollywood" (ibid.). It is very difficult to overstate how significant and applicable this notion is to the ongoing discussions posed in this thesis, particularly about the extent to which the defining elements of Hollywood—and independent—film practices have become warped over time. Novotny Lawrence explores 'The Demise and Aftermath of the Blaxploitation Movement' (2008) and suggests that several factors brought blaxploitation films to an end— "the criticism that mounted over popular blaxploitation films" (Lawrence, 1998: 94) as well as "the emergence of blockbuster features" (Lawrence, 1998: 96) are some of the major contributing factors to the end of the blaxploitation movement. Such criticisms highlight the inevitability of an end to the movement and why the term 'independent' within such a context was notably different to the independence sought outside of the production system that blaxploitation films were produced.

2.2.3. The Blockbuster Age of Hollywood (1982 – Present)

Perhaps the most significant development in contemporary Hollywood has been the emergence of a new form of blockbuster-driven franchises specifically aimed at the global, digital and conglomerate-controlled industry. The great success of DVD also served as a source of revenue for studios and was crucial in transforming technology for the home entertainment industry (Schatz, 2009). Thus, Schatz summarises the growth of contemporary Hollywood by noting that "the most salient development […] has been the formation of the […] Big Six conglomerates and their hegemony over the American film […] industry" (Schatz, 2009: 21). As a result, filmmaking practices in the 2000s were based on the "three distinct sectors wherein three different classes of film producer were creating three different classes of product" (Schatz, 2009: 25). The first is made up of "Hollywood's six traditional major studios" that perform the primary function of producing "franchise-spawning blockbusters budgeted in the $100–$250 million range that are targeted at the global entertainment marketplace and are designed to operate synergistically with [their] parent [companies]" (ibid.). The second sector is made up of "conglomerate-owned film subsidiaries" and has the objective of producing

"more modestly budgeted films in the $30 million to $50 million range for more specialised and discriminating audiences" (ibid.). Finally, the third industry sector includes the:

> [T]ruly independent producer-distributors [that] supply over half of all theatrical releases, usually budgeted in the $5 million to $10 million range […] and that compete for a pitifully small share of the motion picture marketplace, due largely to the proliferation of the conglomerate-owned film subsidiaries. (Schatz, 2009: 25)

These sectors prove useful in showcasing the progression of filmmaking practices in contemporary Hollywood, as well as the aesthetic, socio-economic and political factors that accompany such progressions.

With regards to the ongoing discourse about the evolution of independent cinema in an American context, Yannis Tzioumakis highlights in *Hollywood's Indies: Classics Divisions, Specialty Labels and the American Film Market* that the cinema existed, historically, both within and away from the Hollywood film industry (Tzioumakis, 2012: 3). Significantly, the period between the late 1970s and early 1980s gave rise to a distinct body of independent film production and distribution (ibid.). For instance, Michael Cimino's films during this period were already marked by their visual style and controversial subject matter with films such as *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) (Griffin, 2002: 4). The negative reception of *Heaven's Gate*, as previously highlighted in Chapter 2.2.1, seemingly caused major studios to disassociate themselves from independent filmmakers like Cimino who aspired to make different types of films. This forced filmmakers to source for alternative funding for their films, away from the control of the majors. From the beginning, this body of work was regarded as a "movement", a determined effort among some filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch, Spike Lee and John Sayles, to "create a sustained alternative paradigm to Hollywood cinema" (Tzioumakis, 2012: 2). It was labelled 'Contemporary American Independent Cinema' to connote film productions that supported an "alternative aesthetic, cultural and political ideologies" (ibid.), while excluding all other forms of independent filmmaking with affiliations with Hollywood and its practices.

While this underground movement was slowly forming, there seemed to be wider political repercussions for cinema in the 1980s which will be discussed shortly. The movie industry generated high revenues in the 1980s. According to Tino Balio,

> [T]he worldwide demand for films increased to an unprecedented rate, the result of such factors as economic growth in Western Europe, the Pacific Rim, and Latin America, the end of the Cold War, the commerciali[s]ation of state broadcasting systems, and the development of new distribution technologies. To capitalize on these conditions, Hollywood entered the age of 'globalisation'. (Balio, 1998: 58)

This meant that the movie industry developed video which produced economic growth, a practice that carried on into the 1990s with the growth of the overseas market. Domestic feature film production increased from about "350 pictures a year in 1983 to nearly 600 in 1988" (ibid.). Maltby adds that the high growth rate "ensured strong competition within the industry

and persistent interest from other enterprises in buying into it" with the major studios having very little to do with said growth (Maltby, 2003: 189). Rather, it was generated by the 'mini-majors'—"Orion Pictures, Cannon Films and Dino De Laurentiis Entertainment—and from independents like Atlantic Release, Carolco, New world, Hemdale, Troma, Island Alive, Vestron and New Line who were eager to fill the void" (Balio, 1998: 59). This shifted Hollywood into the age of globalisation.

Going back to the political implications for a globalised Hollywood, several domestic issues like immigration were, as argued by Tzioumakis, undercut by racist ideologies, antifeminism and homophobia (Tzioumakis, 2012: 5). He argues that other undercutting issues such as the perception of the government's desire for a more controlled and constrained America (thus returning to the family values of the 1950s) created an opening for underground filmmakers (ibid.). With regards to foreign policy, the Reagan government was pro-active in advancing American interests through an increase in defence spending and interventionism. These seemingly specific interests were also more general in terms of capitalism. Maltby notes that the Regan administration's relaxed attitude to business regulation saw the majors return to theatre ownership, thus, "in 1986, Columbia purchased some theatres in New York; within a year, MCA, Paramount and WCI had bought or acquired stakes in important theatre chains throughout the country […]" (Tzioumakis, 2012: 191).

The Hollywood film industry in the 1980s produced narratives about success stories with clear-cut heroes often played by big stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone who give solutions to situations with violence (Ryan and Kellner, 1990: 12). Hollywood also produced films with troubled lonesome characters that eventually overcome all their problems and become successful, career wise and as pillars of society. These films include Tony Scott's *Top Gun* (1986), Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables* (1987), *Footloose* (Herbert Ross, [1984]) and *An Officer and Gentleman* (Taylor Hackford, [1982]). Arguably, there was no longer an issue-driven mainstream cinema. Overwhelming social problems like unemployment, social injustice, gay rights, nuclear weapons, racial discrimination, AIDS and poverty remained unexplored in Hollywood films (Ortner, 2012) or were pushed to a narrative periphery, providing the backdrop for the success story of the hero (as in terrorism as a backdrop in *Die Hard* films). Independent cinema hence portrayed an alternative image on screen without the use of violence as a character tool, and with potentially anti-commercial subject matters relating to social issues were addressed, such as "racial discrimination and urban poverty" as portrayed in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Cotton Club* (1984) and Dennis Hopper's *Colors* (1988), as well as the subjects of "drugs […] military brutality […]and male

homosexuality" (Suarez, 2007: 41). This therefore served as the basis for independent filmmakers to produce films with subject matters otherwise *neglected* by Hollywood.

Filmmaking in the 1990s seemed to be marked by a revival of recurrent themes from the New Hollywood era—an era which eventually saw the collapse of relatively high-budget films and franchises in the early 1980s. This collapse was reflected in films such as *Blade Runner* (1982, Ridley Scott)—which made $27.6 million by the end of its initial theatrical run, despite a budget of $30 million. Other films such as Peter Yates' *Krull* (1983) saw a significantly greater loss at the box office of approximately $33.5 million (Moorcroft, 2021). An even greater loss than *Krull*'s box office failure was Elaine May's *Ishtar* (1987) which made $14.4 million at the box office, despite a budget of $51 million, thereby losing a massive $40.6 million (Harmetz, 1987). James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) (discussed later on in Chapter 2.3.1 in terms in its emotive qualities) marked a resurgence of the glory days of the New Hollywood era and thus proves useful when also examining the industrial-economic trends of the blockbuster era.

Plantinga describes *Titanic* as "one of the most successful films of all time on the international market, and in domestic theatrical receipts […] runs second only to *Gone with the Wind* (1939)" (Plantinga, 2009: 238). He adds that the appeal of *Titanic*, unlike with *Gone with the Wind*, however, "extended around the world with roughly two-thirds of its box office revenues being generated outside the United States" (ibid.). The marketing campaign of this film played a significant role in its success, targeting young adult as well as female audiences (Plantinga, 2009). Much like the blockbuster era itself, *Titanic* revived the classic epic genre by blending it with disaster movie elements. In describing the film, Cameron himself notes:

> [W]hat could be more romantic, in the dark and heart wrenching sense of the word, than Titanic, with its stories of men and women torn from each other en masse by a cruel twist of fate, of windows scanning the faces of the few male survivors for the husbands and lovers, of the terrible loss and grief of the morning after… of so many hearts broken. (Cameron quoted in Marsh, 1997: vi)

Indeed, Cameron's vision was a success; setting the pattern for how films should be made and marketed, not only domestically, but also on a global scale.

By the early 2000s, adaptations of popular works had started to dominate Hollywood. This began in 2001 with Warner Bros.' release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, based on literary sagas. The success of these films arguably changed the industry entirely. Crucially, it established a modern storytelling structure, following the attacks of 9/11 and the "war on terror"—a phrase coined by the Bush administration—or at least a restructuring of the audience's interpretation of modern films, which have seemingly been influenced by the audience's perception of contemporary politics. Hence, Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer describe *The Lord of the*

Rings as being "easily transferred to the […] political framework of the war on terror" (Kord and Krimmer, 2011: 96). In terms of psychology, they further argue that contemporary films offer storylines with conflicting messages and that corruption in films "is hardly ever portrayed as a systemic but rather as the result of the moral failure of particular individuals" (Kord and Krimmer, 2011: 8).

In addition to this, contemporary films "fall short of both their liberal intentions and their conservative inclinations. […] Blockbusters appear to suggest that good old violence is the best way to deal with any kind of crisis" (Kord and Krimmer, 2011: 9). They explain that "in film after film, good and evil are blurred. […] almost everyone is corruptible in *The Lord of the Rings,* and almost everyone can be redeemed" (ibid.). Other scholars such as Roger Horrocks in *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture* and Martin Fradley in *Action and Adventure Cinema* also discuss the structural problems of Hollywood contemporary films and its conflicting messaging. Horrocks argues that blockbuster films are proof of a culture of "fearsome male narcissism, a culture of aggrandizement and inflation" (Horrocks, 1995: 20–21). Fradley adds that such structure and culture is marked by a "nostalgia for a prelapsarian homosocial economy of white male centrality" (Fradley, 2004: 238). Thus, even when Hollywood films attempt to address the issue of violence, there is a deep immersion in, and perversion of the subject matter in a manner that is often counter to its intention. Consequently, this leads to films "trivialising and obfuscating the problems they discuss" (Kord and Krimmer, 2011: 9).

Despite such structural and cultural criticisms of the psychology and politics of Hollywood films, the successes of such films as *The Lord of the Rings* did not go unnoticed by other studios. Not only was there a realisation that Fantasy films appealed to a wider audience (Maltby, 2003: 74) but there was also the sense that such films have long-term potential in a way that also boosts transmedia and the viewer-user (*viewser*) relationship, through the production of video games, comic strips and toys so as to appeal to existing fandoms—and merchandising. Such revelations led to the release of 20th Century Fox's *X-Men* (2000, 2003, 2006, 2009 2011, 2013 and 2014) and Columbia's *Spider-Man* Trilogy (Sam Raimi, 2002, 2004 and 2007). With time, Marvel expanded and created its own film studio with the release of *Iron Man* which introduced the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Waxman, 2007: para. 4). In 2011 also, Warner Bros. launched the DC Extended Universe (Barr, 2014: para. 4) which was also a success. Still commenting on the storytelling of such contemporary films, Kord and Krimmer deduce that:

> All these films are highly attuned to their status as spectacles and self-consciously invite us to admire the display of excess not as necessary elements of plot and character but as cinematographic achievements. The pervasive all-seeing eye and the seeing stones in *The*

Lord of the Rings, the omnipresence of reflected images in *The Matrix*, Peter's camera in *Spider-Man*, and the liberal use of television and satellite images in *Iron Man* are designed to remind us of our status as spectators. (Kord and Krimmer, 2011: 89)

This buttresses Geoff King's argument on New Hollywood cinema about the "routine 'disruption[s]' of a certain form of internal coherence" (King, 2002: 181). However, the *disruption* in King's argument is in reference to choices, and not of formal elements like cinematography, that implicitly undermine storytelling in blockbuster films, as Kord and Krimmer suggest.

As highlighted throughout the discussion of Hollywood cinema by scholars such as Tino Balio and Thomas Schatz, globalisation continues to be of high importance in the blockbuster era. It has seemingly brought about a focus on storytelling and visual imagery rather than relying on "the presence of stars" (King, 2002: 181) as was the case in the New Hollywood era. This focus has been made possible because the present era:

[H]as been more self-consciously "international" cinema, partly because of the increasing economic importance of the global market for its products and partly because the end of the studio system literally removed the physical constraints that required "Hollywood" movies to be produced in the Los Angeles studios of the major companies. (Maltby, 2003: 213)

This is also coupled with the fact that the 2000s-era stars, much like in the studio system itself, were removed from prominence. This seemingly led to the perception that big stars were no longer capable of producing the level of success that they did in previous decades.

In summary, Hollywood's modern history can be viewed as a comprehensive development toward its identity today, by way of its aesthetic, socio-economic and political trends. The period from the 1960s to the 1980s saw and introduction of fresh filmic elements by non-independent filmmakers. Despite the harsh economic landscape of the 1970s, Hollywood continued to produce films with linear story narratives based on character-driven actions. At the same time, the Black independent movement emerged, with the aim of seeking independence of representation from Hollywood. This movement most certainly influenced the independent film movement of the 1980s, although the latter movement would come be associated more closely with aesthetics and industry. Hollywood cinema in the 1980s continued to achieve success, although the cinema of the great studio directors as well as that of independent-minded auteurs were diminished. The success of the 1980s was credited to the development of new modes of delivering films to audiences, such as home video and cable. Hollywood also continued to be star-focussed as a means of driving film sales. The video practice, as noted previously, was carried on into the 1990s with the growth of the overseas market. There was also a revival of recurring Hollywood themes from the previous era that saw a rise in Box Office sales with films like *Titanic*.

A globalised Hollywood in the contemporary era has led to the domination of the market by event films, franchises and/or high-concept films. Such films have relied on easily digestible storylines and spectacular visual imagery, geared towards a global market, rather than depending on the presence of big stars as it did in previous decades. Crucially, in the contemporary Hollywood era, the term independent has come to signify a type of product and system that departs from the products in Hollywood cinema. Economically, however, independent productions have become integrated into the practices of the major studios. As previously explained, the period before the mid–1990s, what could be described as the *pre-Blair Witch era*, saw a rather simple method of separating Hollywood's productions. As explained by Thomas Schatz, these categories comprised of the ultra-high budget films; the moderately-priced budget films, distributed by the major studios; as well as the independent low-budget productions. The *post-Blair Witch era* has seen an erosion with the distinction between the *moderate* and the *low-budget* category. Hence, more than ever, it may be more accurate to distinguish between only two categories: 1) industrially, big-budget international productions and smaller-budget productions—that rely very little on the international market—and 2) aesthetically, the emotive and affective sensibilities and qualities offered in the films within these two categories.

2.3. Cognitive Film Theory

This section of the thesis discusses an expanding new area of film studies that ventures into the ways in which cognitive research in mental functions can serve as a means of better understanding the role psychological elements play, not only in film, but in the experience of it. Scholars such as Carl Plantinga (2002), Greg Smith (2003), Murray Smith (1995; 2022), David Bordwell (2009), Noël Carroll (2006), Steven Shaviro (2008), Torben Grodal (1997), Eugenie Brinkema (2014), Gregory Currie (1995), Vivian Sobchack (2004) and Ed Tan (1996, 2013) have all explored film theory and its relationship with cognitivism. Similarly, this thesis explores cognitive science and seeks to serve as an extension of the scholars listed above. This chapter will explore the concepts of emotion and affect at length. However, it is important to note that while emotion and affect are related, they are distinct concepts in psychology, and as this chapter will argue, they are also distinct within a filmic context. For example, Emotion is a complex psychological state that involves expressive behaviour (such as sadness). Affect, on the other hand, is the observable expression of emotion (such as grief) which is informed by mechanisms such as body language, facial feedback as well as the tone of voice. This chapter will expand on both concepts in chapters 2.3.1 and 2.3.2.

This thesis does not assume that an extensive exploration of the functions of mental processes is a clear indication of provisions for a solid basis for film theory. The concepts of emotion and affect in film have been explored primarily through research by cognitive film theorists. Affect for example, is rather abstract in nature because it cannot be fully realised in language; it is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness. Affect performs the function of preparing the body for action in a particular situation and serves to intensify the quality of an experience. Hence Brain Massumi notes that the body possesses independent thought which cannot be fully captured in language because it "doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it unfolds contexts" (Massumi, 2002: 30). This means, therefore, that affect is contextual in nature.

Filmic emotion(s) too, faces a similar issue; it is rather difficult to theorise because emotion arguably functions differently depending on elements such as the genre, the narration, the writing and the production. Crucially, it could also be argued that it depends on the quality of the text, although what makes a good/quality film will always be subject to individual criticisms, a stance that is evidenced in and by this thesis' approach to the subject. An attempt to theorise such *porous* conceptions as emotion and affect is solely within the context that is afforded, in what the discourse of independent cinema encompasses. Thus, in theory, such eventual descriptions, if any, of what the identity of independent cinema is—with the consideration of such notions as emotion and affect in film—must be contextualised. While discoursally, *independence* may exceed the boundaries of the text and could be extended to the concept of emotional intelligence; a theorisation of emotion and affect within said independence cannot exceed such boundaries. As noted in the introduction, while an exploration into the transcending abilities of film discourse is a relevant approach to film criticism, this thesis only seeks to focus on cinematic discourse within the realms of film as its medium through which cinema is fixed; rather than an extensive focus on whether the conceptions from discourse, and discourse analysis of independent cinema should be extended beyond the cinema itself.

It is worth noting here that in this thesis, the use of the term 'filmic emotion'—used interchangeably with just 'emotion'—does not suggest a distinction from everyday emotions. Of course, there is a contextual difference between the two: the former involves an engagement with film narrative whereas the latter involves real world experiences and interactions. However, such differences are not relevant to the inquiry of this thesis as both emotions share several fundamental aspects. For instance, both types of emotion are influenced by cognition through perception. In other words, film emotion and everyday emotion require an interpretation of visual and auditory cues in order to evoke emotional responses. Furthermore,

the element of narrative exists both in film and in the real world. That is, emotional response in film is brought about by an engagement with unfolding narrative and character development while an emotional response in everyday life is elicited through personal experiences, narratives, and events. Also, the emotional impact of an event or narrative—both in film and in everyday life—are equally as real in terms of impact and the longevity of its effect. This is because emotional responses in both configurations operate under the same *schematic constructions*, based on the engagement and knowledge of film and lived experiences (as explained by Grodal, 2009: 205 in Chapter 2).

A difference between both formations would then imply that emotions are a primary response in the every-day, and a secondary response in a filmic context, because in the latter configuration, emotion is first embodied in the film characters which is then experienced by the audience through an identification of such emotions followed by feelings of empathy or sympathy. The emotional response here, as *real* as they may be, could be argued to be vicariously achieved.

Ed Tan describes emotions in this perspective as "witness emotions" (Tan, 2013: 182). He notes that witness emotions—or *vicarious emotions* (Tan, 2013: 176)—refers to the emotional responses derived from an audience's engagement with film characters and narrative. Tan notes that the audience must observe events as well the interaction between film characters, their triumphs, struggles and relationships—thereby becoming witnesses to the characters' lives and the unfolding narrative—in order to experience the range of emotions that are offered through such observations. The concept of witness emotion could also be applied to everyday emotions. For example, if a subject (such as a child) has an emotional response (such as sadness) due to the actions of a specific object (such as the child's mother crying on the telephone), then the subject could be said to be experiencing a witness/vicarious emotion. This is because the child's sadness is generated by the actions of the subject who is embodying specific emotions, rather than an emotional response from the child that is generated due to a personal struggle. Emotions such as sadness and empathy as well as concepts relating to emotion (such as witness emotion) thence function similarly in film as well as in the everyday life.

The complexities that exist within both contexts contributes to the thesis' objections to drawing distinctions that would ultimately not be of any real value to the inquiry of the thesis. Moreover, the implication for the application of a *secondary* emotion descriptor would be more justifiable in this thesis than assigning filmic emotions as witness/vicarious emotions. The implication of the former is simply that there is an added layer/channel/medium of cognition, perception, immersion, and comprehension by which emotional experience is achieved by the

subject. In contrast, the latter suggests that it is a pseudo-subject who embodies emotion and consequently, such embodied emotions are not *truly* their own because the emotions are, in the first instance, contained in a separate body. Again, the thesis makes no distinction between emotion in both spaces because emotion in the every-day and filmic/audience emotion are interlinked and complex due to several factors such as ideological influences. Hence, by approaching emotion through cognitive processes, the thesis is able to bypass the purely subjective debates about the psychoanalytic perspective of emotion which is beyond its scope.

Greg Smith raises address this issue surrounding emotion and notes that "when film academics do address emotion, they generally proceed as if the concept of emotions were clearly and widely understood; therefore, the task of the film scholar is to say what is specific about *filmic* emotions" (Smith, 2003: 6). Perhaps an obvious difference between filmic emotion and emotion of the everyday is that the former is sometimes derived from a conscious/deliberate construction. This is not to say that in all cases, the resulting emotion(s) from a film has been generated solely from such constructions. As will be explained shortly, regardless of such constructions, an understanding of film texts, and therefore an interpretation of it, will always rely on the viewer's experience of the every-day. Additionally, the emotional responses as well as the quality of such emotions elicited by both conceptions, are arguably the same and equally real. The discussions about certain differences between the nature of filmic and every-day emotions will only serve to show how, when combined, serve the same purpose. For example, there may be specific emotional responses constructed for the purpose of the cinema, such as the integration of reality and fiction in film—or the construction of emotion to elicit an opposite emotional response—but such inferences in this thesis simply serves the purpose of showing how both emotions complement each other through cognition.

Sociologist Susan Feagin attempts to make this distinction in *Imagining Emotions and Appreciating Fiction;* and "real life" (Feagin, 1988: 485) emotions are loosely framed and are also controlled in content. Filmic emotions (referred to as "art emotion" by Feagin, 1998: 485) on the other hand are tightly framed and are also uncontrolled in content. This leads to such questions as "what justifies having one emotion rather than another? [and] [w]hy should we think emotionally responding to fiction is desirable [?]" (ibid.). Structurally, the analysis of emotion here is certainly reasonable. Crucially however, it is precisely why both forms should be understood through a single approach, particularly because of the questions posed here by Feagin. Moreover, there should be an acknowledgement that both structures accompany each other; where filmic emotion relies on *the real*. Hence, to proffer an answer to Feagin's question; it is because cognitively, both forms are indistinguishable, and are themselves different from the structure of said emotional form. Hence the event (structure) is not as relevant as the

outcome (emotion) of said event. As earlier stated, emotion and affect have been explored mainly through the concept of cognitive film theory, hence, in eliciting emotion, the audience primarily relies on cognition to interpret/understand film texts. The same process is true for emotion of the everyday. Thus, cognitively, filmic emotion and everyday emotion can be understood through a single approach.

Going back to the argument posed about specific emotional responses constructed for cinema; filmmakers may utilise film genre style, such as black comedy, to create a specific emotional response. As will be discussed shortly, Greg Smith's peripheral approach to emotion asserts that emotional experience is determined by "facial feedback" (Smith, 2003: 17). Therefore, emotions begin with bodily states before they are mentally processed; one would need to elicit physical emotion (such as laughter) to enable the sustainment of a mood or feeling (such as happiness). Constructed filmic emotion can suspend the logic of the peripheral process where negative emotion from an experiencing body, for example, elicits a positive emotional response from the audience. Again, this filmic trend will be discussed shortly. In such specific examples therefore, it could be argued that filmic emotions are antithetical to everyday emotion.

Moving on to the subject of the implication of film approaches on emotional response, Vivian Sobchack explains the integration of reality and fiction in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. She employs a "pragmatic and phenomenological perspective" to deduce the incorporation of documentary material into fiction film and how these conditions are "charged" for the audience (Sobchack, 2004: 268). She asserts that when filmmakers insert "real" material into film texts, it triggers the audience's "*embodied* and *subjective* sense of what counts as the *existential* and *objective* 'real'" (ibid.). Sobchack however emphasises that:

> Our engagement with and determination of film images as fictional or real may be experienced either preconsciously or consciously, idiosyncratically, or conventionally, momentarily or for relatively sustained period of time. […] [Significantly], whatever the textual incentives offered by film, this engagement and determination depend always on the viewer's existential knowledge of and social investment in the context of a lifeworld that exceeds and frames the text. (Sobchack, 2004: 268)

Here, she is challenging the notion that there is an objective standard for distinguishing documentary from fiction. Instead, she argues that an individual's engagement with a text is determined by their life experience and extra-textual knowledge which serves as a prerequisite for setting expectations, and specific experience of being in the film space when viewing a documentary or fiction. This consequently means that even when emotion is constructed using varying codes within a film text, it is always loosely constructed, as internalisation and interpretation will always rely on the viewer's feelings (real life experiences). Thus, Sobchack notes that "what the generic terms *fiction* and *documentary* designate are an experienced

difference in our mode of consciousness, our attention toward and our valuation of the cinematic objects we engage" (Sobchack, 2004: 261). The argument posed here lends credence to one of the arguments previously presented, that a difference between everyday emotion and filmic emotion, if any, is redundant within the specific context that the individual will always employ the same mechanisms (such as emotional intelligence) to deduce the text/situation.

In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, David Bordwell discusses the evolution of, and developments in the study of cognitive film theory. As he explains, "cinema has obvious psychological and social effects [with] cognitive sciences for assistance [when] answering questions of film theory" (Bordwell, 2009: 356). He goes on to pose a question parallel to one of the key questions of this thesis: "What accounts of human mental activity best helps us understand the ways in which films stir our senses, arouse our passions and provoke us to thought?" (ibid.). This question will be considered as the thesis explores the functions of cognition in cinema. Carl Plantinga and Murray Smith, in *Passionate Views: Film Cognition and Emotion* (1999), highlight some of the properties that make up the emotion system in film, and the forms in which they exist.

They discuss emotion as tearjerkers (as in *An Affair to Remember*, [1957, Leo McCarey]), emotion by inspiring fear and disgust (in *Night of the Living Dead* [1968, George A. Romero]), sublime emotion (evoked in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* [1928, Carl Theodor Dreyer]), emotion through comedy films (as proffered in *When Harry Met Sally* [1989, Rob Reiner]), aroused emotion (in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* [1981, Steven Spielberg]), emotion brought by narrative flow (in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* [1982, Steven Spielberg]), emotion through music (in *The Elephant Man* [1980, David Lynch]), emotion derived from sense of timing (as suggested in *Stranger than Paradise* [1984, Jim Jarmusch]), emotion by way of desire and resolution (as in *Casablanca* [1942, Michael Curtiz]), emotion by means of audience identification with the main characters (elicited in *The Crying Game* [1992, Neil Jordan]), emotion evoked through the portrayal of perversity (in *The Silence of the Lambs* [1991, Jonathan Demme]), and finally, emotion conjured through film technique such as close-up shots (in *Blade Runner* [1982, Ridley Scott]). Plantinga and Smith provide an understanding of the emotional power in motion picture by citing these films as examples to explore the relationship between the emotion system and the techniques adopted by filmmakers in order to derive reactions from an audience. What they do not do however, is explore the implication of the provision of such emotional qualities on cinema representation, and consequently, how said quality-based identities could serve as a way of distinguishing between systems of film production. They instead analyse films purely in terms of the strategies they adopt, rather than in terms of how such strategies influence the type of cinema they represent.

Carl Plantinga, in *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Film*, argues for a broad conception of cognition that incorporates bodily and affective processes, emphasising the position of affect within cognition. Plantinga claims that the presence of *the body* and *affect* in film tend to undermine the concept of cognition in film theory and philosophy, adding that "a lack of attention to cognition is a serious error" (Plantinga, 2016: 131). Plantinga gives a clear-cut definition of the role of cognition as it relates to the audience and film viewing. He describes it as "the mental activities of gaining knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses" as well as "the results of such activities—comprehension, intuition, insight [and] perception" (ibid.). He then goes on to argue that "cognition is neither singular nor linear" and that "the modularity of the mind suggests multiple cognitive processes occurring simultaneously and connected in complex ways" (ibid.). The premise of Plantinga's argument, about the role of cognition in film, comes as a response to Steven Shaviro's analysis on cognition in *The Cinematic Body* (2008). Shaviro argues that the rule from cognitive theorists of excluding "anything that might be considered unconscious" makes it difficult to ask important questions about other areas relating to cognitive film theory such as "desire, fantasy, passion and emotion" (Shaviro, 2008: 50–51). Plantinga rejects this notion, arguing that 'moods' have "characteristic cognitive styles and can draw together memory and associations. [Therefore], desire, emotion and mood are aspects of cognition rather than separate from it" (Plantinga, 2016: 133). Cognition, as Plantinga notes, "is not separate from affect and bodily processes; rather, affect and bodily processes are aspects of cognition" (ibid.). The relationship between cognition and affective bodily processes will be examined in Chapter 2.3.2 as well as in later chapters when close-examining film texts.

As mentioned previously, emotion is a very porous filmic element and difficult to concretise in general. This is because several factors need to be accounted for even when discussed within specific contexts. In film, considerations must be made about the function and structure of the emotional experience as well as how emotion is offered within a film to emotionally appeal to an audience. In *Philosophy of Film and Motion Picture* (2006), Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi draw a further distinction between emotion in the context of cinema and emotion in everyday use. In its latter use, Carroll argues that emotion "encompasses a wide range of affective states, from reflex responses […] to more complex and long-lasting emotional states such as loyalty […]" (Carroll, 2006: 213). This of course highlights Feagin's assertion that *real life* emotion is loosely framed. The implication for this distinction is that emotion within the context of cinema deals with the combination of both *cognitive* and *feeling* states. They further argue that:

> Unlike the common-sense view that holds emotion to be the opposite to cognition or rationality, cognition is an essential component of emotion […]. The cognitive component

of emotion not only causes the affective elements of emotion, but also provides us with a typology of emotion. (Carroll, 2006: 213)

This buttresses Plantinga's argument previously cited about *affect* and *bodily processes* as qualities of cognition. Carroll further suggests that the integration of both components of cognition and emotion provides an opening for a new classification and interpretation of emotion.

In *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies* (2009), Plantinga explains that "the study of the way film elicits emotions has been one of the key areas of research in cognitive film theory" (Plantinga, 2009: 10). Plantinga references *Titanic* (1997, James Cameron) as a case study to show how film elicits emotion in an audience and how cognitive film theory can help in identifying the affective appeals of a film such as *Titanic*. Why is Cameron's film popular and enjoyable when it represents tragic and disastrous events? This intricacy in *structure versus emotional response* leads Plantinga to coin the phrase "paradox of negative emotion" (Plantinga, 2009: 176) in *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Through this phenomenon, Plantinga notes that viewers "can learn something about the psychological appeal of much popular art that elicits negative emotions" (Plantinga, 2009: 238). The significance of such emotions will be explored more broadly in Section Three of the thesis, alongside Greg Smith's approach to emotion, to understand the cognition behind such emotional constructions.

2.3.1. Emotion in Film

Lara Thompson (*Film Light: Meaning and Emotion*) considers emotion through light in cinema. She argues that "as much as light brings both the projected image and the subject of the projection into existence, it also indicates to the spectator where to look, who to look at and how to feel" (Thompson, 2017: 14). She further notes how a "directional, bright or dramatic light" will have a crucial role of *enticing* and *seducing* the eye (ibid.). Such results, she notes, is achieved when said light "draws the gaze, centralising the 'look' at the brightest point on the screen, focusing attention on those parts of the image that the filmmaker deems important" (ibid.). It would appear that this argument is made solely, with the consideration of mainstream films (that tend to be associated more with spectacular visual imagery), and perhaps theatrical productions. Arguably, this line of reasoning does not apply to independent films, particularly low-budget independent films. Thompson also makes the argument that the positive perception of "illumination" as well as the negative perception of darkness are connotations and manifestations of "religious symbolism and art practice [that] has been reinforced throughout

cinematic history" (ibid.). She then discusses the imaging and imagining of emotion, noting that, "one of the primary values of cinema as both an entertainment medium and an art form is its ability to travel within, to visualise the workings of the human mind, to imagine thought processes and emotions on the screen" (Thompson, 2017: 76). This is true for all forms of art where the various elements offered in these forms of expression can make "familiar feelings spectacular" (ibid.).

The analysis of imaging of emotion is certainly true for all types of film. This is simply due to the fact that the process of imagining transcends any system of production and "hearkens back to prelinguistic communication" (Plantinga, 1999: 239). Similarly, in *Passionate Views,* Plantinga explores the way emotion is utilised in film. He argues that:

> Many films feature a kind of scene in which the pace of the narrative momentarily slows, and the interior emotional experience of a favoured character becomes the focus of attention. […] [In this] *scene of empathy*, we see a character's face, typically in closeup, either for a single shot of long duration or as an element of a point-of-view structure alternating between shots of a character's face and shots of what she or he sees. In either case, the prolonged concentration on the character's face is not warranted by the simple communication of information about character emotion. (Plantinga, 1999: 239)

Plantinga stresses that scenes such as these exist to elicit "empathetic emotions" in the viewer (ibid.). He is not merely describing emotions elicited through close-up shots in a film as he is consciously taking into account, the importance of the way in which the human face is used in a manner that transcends the image on the screen—a process in which the human face directly appeals to our other senses. The notion of the *scene of empathy* directly reinforces the psychology behind Greg Smith's Peripheral approach to emotions, which this thesis will continue to highlight.

Noël Carroll also discusses the ways in which filmmakers use the human face as a means of communicating to the audience, the emotional state of the character. In *Theorising the Moving Image*, Carroll explains how a combination of the human face and point-of-view editing, serves to heighten the viewing experience. Similar to Plantinga's argument, he notes that it is important to identify this editing style's "serviceability in securing the purpose of the movies [...] in effectively addressing mass audiences" (Carroll, 1996: 126). As justification for his argument, Carroll goes on to break down the two forms in which the point-of-view editing style exists:

> The point/glance shot is of a person looking, generally offscreen [and] the point/object shot is putatively of whatever the person sees. The elements of this structure can be iterated in various, expanded ways, and the point/glance shot may precede the point/object shot and vice-versa, in what [Edward] Branigan respectively calls prospective and retrospective structures. (Carroll, 1996: 127)

Carroll refers to the point/glance shot as a "range finder" and the point/object shot as a "focuser", noting that the former enables the audience to identify the "global emotional state"

(Carroll, 1996: 132) of the character by studying their face, while the latter reveals to the audience, the object of focus of the character or the object of the character's emotion.

Several scholars touch on the subject of music in relation to emotion. In *Film Music as Embodiment*, Juan Chattah explores the cognitive use of music in film. Music, he notes, "is a multi-parametric construct that operates at an almost subliminal level to support, highlight, complement, or even negate any other aspect of the cinematic experience" (Chattah, 2015: 81). By "multi-parametric construct", Chattah refers to the idea that film music contains multiple elements that work together to create and enhance the emotional experience of a film. The term highlights the intricacy of film music as an art form as well as the ways in which music is utilised and manipulated in film to enhance storytelling and cater to the emotional needs of the film. He further suggests that film music performs the function of generating texture and physicality and "portrays a character's mood, state of mind, or other (non-visual) parameters" (Chattah, 2015: 82). Music theorist, Arnie Cox makes a parallel argument in his article *The Mimetic Hypothesis and Embodied Musical Meaning.* He hypothesises that "part of how we understand [...] human-made sounds are in terms of our experience of making the same or similar movements and sounds" (Cox, 2001: 196). For example, when a scream is heard on screen, it has the tendency to generate physicality through an understanding of an embodied mode of being in the world. Mark Ward in *Art in Noise* adds to this thought and makes several *assumptions* about the state of cinema.

On the subject sound design, he explains that it "has the capacity to shape visual perception and steer visual attention and may interact with vision to produce synesthetic experience" (Ward, 2015: 158). Additionally, one may have a "satisfying cinematic experience" without any involvement with the experience of narrative (Ward, 2015: 158). This assumption then leads Ward to conclude that "cinema is not primarily narrative, but affective" and that "it is unlikely one may have a meaningful narrative experience without it also being an emotional one" (ibid.). Ward's key arguments about the nature of cinema prove effective, as the true measure of one's cinematic experience is measured through a film's ability to manipulate/permit a subjective experience of time, space as well as movement. Hence by prioritising cinema as a *spatiotemporal* system, "cinema becomes intrinsically multimodal [and more importantly], an affective spatio-temporal system" (Ward, 2015: 159). This follows on from Bordwell's previously mentioned argument in Chapter 2.2.1 about the way in which the spatial and temporal systems serve as a means of enhancing the narrative element in film and therefore the cinematic experience of film (Bordwell, 2019: 11).

As the thesis begins to explore case study films in Chapter 4, it will showcase how formal elements/formalist styles such as mise-en-scène, lighting and sound design can—through

perception and cognition—influence the reading, comprehension and interpretation of the visual and auditory information presented in film. This will involve an exploration of the narrative structure of film, its visual imagery and character development, as well as the films' pacing and emotional arcs.

Cognitive psychologist Stephen Handel remarks on this notion stating that "spatial and temporal change defines the properties of events and objects" (Handel, 1998: 315). Sobchack (2004) explores these properties, too, in *Carnal Thoughts*. She highlights the representation and experience of the body as well as the spatial orientation and movement of the body. Like Ward, Sobchack argues that there is an "embodied and radically material nature of human existence and thus the lived body's essential implication is making 'meaning' out of bodily 'sense'" (Sobchack, 2004: 1). Although Sobchack's approach to emotion in film is informed by the notion of 'existential phenomenology'; a term which philosopher Don Ihde describes in *Technology and the Lifeworld* as "a philosophical style that emphasizes a certain interpretation of human experience and that, in particular, concerns perception and bodily activity" (Ihde, 1990: 21); it nonetheless highlights the "phenomena of experience and their meaning as spatially and temporally embodied, lived, and valued by an objective subject" (Sobchack, 2004: 2). There are also other approaches to emotion in film, particularly those informed by phenomenology as well as *haptics*, including Vivian Sobchack's *the Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, and Laura Marks' *The Skin of the Film*. Marks coins the term "'haptic visuality' [to suggest] the way vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes" (Marks, 2000: xi). She uses this approach to explain the types of "knowledge and memory" that "experimental and mainstream cinema" hold within them (Marks, 2000: xiii). Marks seems to assign a hierarchy on cinema based on the level of residual/inherent use of knowledge (feelings) afforded by the cinema. Hence, intercultural cinema is placed above Western cinema where the latter merely relies on "supplement" knowledge and memory in an array of resources at its disposal.

The former however, "appeals to embodied knowledge and memory in the absence of other resources" (Marks, 2000: xiii). Marks' arguments are therefore informed by "theories of embodied spectatorship" which are further informed by "phenomenology and feminist criticism" (ibid.). Similar questions of spectatorship and interpretation are addressed in *Carnal Thoughts*, where Sobchack explores the gap between the tactile, multi-sensory experience of watching films, and the accounts of this experience by film scholars who often rely on conventional models in discussing this experience. Unlike Mark's interpretation of experience and meaning, however, Sobchack argues that "we do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the

full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium" (Sobchack, 2004: 63). Although the approaches put forward by Marks and Sobchack will not be a primary focus of this thesis, they certainly offer useful challenges in the area of emotion in film.

Perhaps the main issue/limitation with/of the phenomenological model is that it understands films primarily as realist rather than as exemplifying aesthetics, and therefore struggles to distinguish between the cinematic experience and our experience of *reality*. It is important to note here that this criticism should not be confused with one of the main arguments of this thesis about the redundancy in the distinction between filmic emotion and emotion of the everyday. The argument posed in the case of this thesis is justified by noting that the audience will always rely on the same emotion system (such as feelings, mood and affective experiences) to interpret the text/situation, and this will ultimately determine their experience of the text. In Marks and Sobchack's case, the contention about the *reality* of the experience is primarily of the text itself, rather than the emotion offered by the text. Consequently (and to hark back to the thesis' rebuttal of Feagin), the *reality* in this thesis is contextual (emotion-based) and not textual (structure-based). Nonetheless, the arguments put forward by Marks and Sobchack, in intimate and sometimes poetic style, offer a persuasive case for the value of bodily cultural criticisms.

Greg Smith's conceptions of emotion in film, as highlighted in Chapter 2.3, also examines the process by which film is able to elicit emotions in audiences. The expectations an audience has about film will often generate an emotional investment in a film. Both the emotion represented in a film and the emotional response it generates is of vital importance to the overall experience of film. In *Film Structure and the Emotion System,* Smith examines the *emotion system* and looks into the relationship between cognition and emotion. In doing this, he questions the roles society and culture play in forming and developing emotion. Smith explains that "as we learn more about the interdependence of bodily and cognitive functioning, emotion begins to look less like an exception and more like another example of the highly interconnected human processing" (Smith, 2003: 17). Hence, he emerges with four theoretical approaches to answer these central questions: peripheral, central neurophysiological, cognitive appraisal, and social constructivist. Peripheral theories, as he explains, relies on "facial feedback" since "the high concentration of nerves in the face" means that "the information provided by the face is particularly important in determining emotional experience" (ibid.). This suggests that emotions begin with bodily states, which we then evaluate and sustain mentally. For example, *I cry, therefore I am sad.*

The central neurophysiological theories, unlike the peripheral, draws attention to the source of the emotions: the central nervous system. Since emotions go through "more rapid

changes than […] the periphery [it can therefore] not be responsible […] for the emotions" (Smith, 2003: 17). This theory is perhaps more *affective* than it is *emotive* as there is a lack of intentionality towards the object of the emotion. This quality will be expanded on shortly. The third approach—the cognitive appraisal theories—stresses the significance of "cognitive appraisal of [a] situation into the psychological study of emotion" (Smith, 20013: 18). This approach shows empirically that emotions depend just as much on the value that we assign them, as they do on electrochemical stimuli.

In the final approach—the social constructivist theories—Smith asserts that "cultural forces are not merely overlaid onto more essential biological foundations of the emotions […]. Instead, […] emotions cannot be understood outside of culture and the shaping forces of society" (Smith, 2003: 18). Furthermore, "the rules of emotion are learned through socialisation, which guides us toward a preferred set of responses" (ibid.). From Smith's theory, and those from scholars discussed, it is reasonable to conclude that: (a) the emotion system is highly structured (an argument held by Feagin as previously explained), (b) emotional experiences are different from expressions of emotions but they are equally important in understanding filmic emotion (c) consciousness does not have a monopoly on emotions, and a cognitive concept with regards to human experiences is also applicable (d) emotion is object-based and is therefore always directed at something. Most importantly, this thesis argues that emotion involves bodily processes which could boarder on the affective, such as a racing heart resulting from excitement. It also argues that emotion involves an expressive outcome/movement, which include expressions based on *facial feedback* and expressions based on sound, such as a verbal reaction/exclamation due to a fascination with the object of the emotion. Lastly, this thesis argues that emotion involves behaviour, such as an expressive outcome of aggression resulting from anger. The components of bodily processes, expressive movements as well as behaviour, are all elements that define emotion.

2.3.2. Affect in Film

Where is the affect in a film? Though it may seem like a rather straightforward question, the actual situation of a film's affect, unlike emotion is anything but easy to specify. While emotion faces its own set of complications and is dependent on several factors, as highlighted previously it is certainly easy to identify, not only through how it manifests itself, but also by specifying what the object of such manifestations is. With affect, more pressing questions arise: is affect located primarily or exclusively in the film itself; in the object that conveys the story? Or is affect located in its sources—i.e., in the intentions of the filmmaker? Furthermore, can affect

(and indeed emotion), be said to reside in the minds and bodies of the audience of a film? Of these three considerations—the film, the filmmaker, and the audience—which affective state most influences the audiences' experience of film? Crucially, since affect is abstract and always precedes consciousness; an intensity that lays dormant until triggered by an event, what parameters can be effectively utilised in measuring such an intensity, and therefore what qualifies as affect based on such parameters? Of course, a case can be made for each of these questions, whether considered separately or in combination.

This thesis, however, will foreground the active role of the film text in the construction and manifestation of affect within the spatiotemporal system. This will not necessarily be the same approach taken in the exploration of emotion in film. As explained, due to of the nature of affect, it is necessary to limit the exploration of where it is manifested, hence, in mirroring the text as the subject for emotional engagement and emotional response; the affective state of the filmic bodies through formal constructions is given priory in this thesis. To go back to Brian Massumi's point, affect "doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it unfolds contexts" (Massumi, 2002: 30). Therefore, affect, if priority must be given to the object of such affects, should be assigned to the audience and the subject of affect becomes the text since it has a contextual quality, and despite its sources, will rely on the *final body* within filmic constructions to reveal the meaning as well as the consequence of such meanings. This is not to say that the situation of affect in the text does not overlap with such affects found within the audience, or in the intentions of the filmmaker; but the affective state, when referenced in this thesis, prioritises the text's embodiment of affect.

Indeed, the affective experience of the audience is crucial within this discussion. Carl Plantinga lists five reasons as to why the affective experience of the audience is important:

> (1) a pleasurable affective experience is one of the primary motivations for film viewing; (2) emotions provide narrative and character information and are necessary to fully understand a narrative film; (3) emotions and affects, whether pleasurable or not, are a central element of the phenomenological experience of the cinema; (4) emotions are intimately tied to conniptions, and for this reason affective experience, meaning and interpretation are firmly intertwined; and (5) emotions as experienced in films has powerful rhetorical functions and contribute to a film's ideological effects. (Plantinga, 2009: 86)

In Section 3, the thesis will explore the affective experience of film and the important aspects of such experiences (such as the relationship between emotions, narrative and character information) through films such as *John Q.* (2022) and *My Sister's Keeper* (2009). However, before an in-depth exploration of the importance of affective film experiences, it is imperative to deconstruct the term "affect" and the implication for its use in film. Of the three central terms used so far in discussing cognitive theory—feelings, emotion, and affect—affect is the most abstract because again, affect cannot be fully realised in language (Massumi, 2002: 30). As

aforementioned, affect is the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative aspect of intensity to the quality of an experience. Undoubtedly, the body has a programme of its own that cannot be fully captured in language. In addition to its abstract and contextual nature, affect also unfolds "volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated" (ibid), thus, it proves difficult to theorise affect in film. It then becomes very crucial in this thesis to explain how the concept of affect will be used in film analysis. This thesis will continue to consider the *quality* debate within film studies as a way of creating a channel through which we might theorise emotion and affect in film.

Affect, as Plantinga notes, is broader and more complex than the concept of emotion. He explains that affects "are any felt bodily state, including a wide range of phenomena, including emotions, mood, reflex actions, autonomic responses, mirror reflexes, desires [and] pleasures" (Plantinga, 2009: 87). Emotions, on the other hand, "are a special case of affect because they are intentional, that is, they *take* an *object* and represent a relationship between a person and [their] environment" (ibid.). As an example, he cites Peter Goldie's use of the emotion of fear and jealousy where Goldie analogises that:

> The object of [ones] fear might be a charging rhinoceros. The object of [ones] jealousy is that man or woman chatting up [ones] spouse. [This] fear and jealousy are intentional because they are about something and are directed at something". (Goldie, 2000: 16)

It is important to explain the language used by Goldie here. His argument suggests that emotions such fear and jealousy, are *intentional* which seems to mean in the sense that they are directed at a particular object, and not in the sense that one truly *intends* to exhibit said fear or jealousy. In contrast, affect lacks intentionality or *aboutness*. As Plantinga explains:

> My indigestion and feelings of nausea are caused by eating too many tacos, perhaps, but my indigestion is not about those tacos in the way that my jealousy is about that threatening lothario. The indigestion is merely a matter of stimulus and response and is not an intentional relationship. (Plantinga, 2009: 87)

As an example of this, he cites Noël Carroll (*The Philosophy of Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, 2006) who argues that affect is more "structurally primitive" and thus uses the term emotion for "affects that have a complex structure that integrates computation […] with feelings" (Plantinga, 2009: 87).

In *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, Goldie addresses the bodily experience of mood, which he considers a form of affect. He notes that: "a mood involves feeling towards an *object* just as much as does an emotion, although [...] what the feeling is directed towards will be less specific in the case of a mood" (Goldie, 2000: 143). Goldie then argues that in addition its loosely structured nature, mood lasts longer than emotion and may therefore last for hours or days. Hence, "sometimes bad moods follow negative emotions, and good moods follow positive emotions" (Plantinga, 2009: 87). For example, one may cry due to the death of a pet. The resulting feeling from crying, hours or even days later, will be one of sadness. This

echoes Smith's approach of peripheral theories, where emotions begin with bodily states before being internalised mentally. Such internalised emotions could be regarded as a mood. However, Goldie's notion that the object of the feeling in the case of a mood is less specific is rather problematic. He argues that "moods are generally not specific enough to explain specific actions—that is, action which can be explained by beliefs, desires and feelings towards [an object]", but that "a mood can be expressed in expressive action, as well as by expressions that are not themselves actions" (Goldie: 2000: 147). But surely the object of the emotion is also the object of the mood? In other words, if one's mood is that of sadness because they have been crying, then supposedly, one's sadness as a result of a dead pet, is a direct result of one having cried?

In a cinematic context, it is important to ask the question: does the verisimilitude of a film's subject matter affect emotional outcome? In other words, if a film is based on true events for example, and provokes tears; what kind of mood subsequently follows such an emotion, perhaps even outside of the cinematic space? Compare this with a response of tears elicited from an entirely fictional film, and the form in which the mood—negative or positive—is manifested. Consider, therefore, a realistic fiction film such as Josh Boone's 2014 film *The Fault in Our Stars* in comparison to a fictionalised account based on real events in *Titanic* (1997). Do the emotions made available to the audience, by Boone have elements of relief in *The Fault in Our Stars* (even though the film has elicited tears), knowing that the tragic events of the film, although rooted in reality, has not actually happened to the characters specifically? Is the feeling of sadness offered to the audience in *Titanic* brought about from Rose's tragic love story or because the film serves as a reminder of the sinking of the actual RMS Titanic? These kinds of questions present the complex nature of affect as well as mood, feeling and emotion, and how they impact each other. But more importantly, in this thesis, it shows the various kinds of moods made available to the audience by filmmakers, and in such films mentioned here, could be such moods as reflective, gloomy or calm.

Going back to the significance of the affective experience in film; much like Plantinga, Christopher Hauke discusses affect in a way that is crucial to the interpretation of *realities*. As he notes, "it is impossible to imagine the beginnings of psychoanalysis without the concept of affect. It is as essential a foundation stone as the unconscious mind, the mechanism of repression and the hysterical symptom" (Hauke, 2000: 227). Plantinga goes along with this line of argument, adding that when discussing Psychoanalytic Film Theory, there has been a tendency of film theorists to "approach […] questions of cinema and affect nearly exclusively from the standpoint of psychoanalysis" (Plantinga, 2009: 86). This concept, he argues, has solely involved the discussion of desires and pleasures in the context of human affect while

failing to explore emotions such as "fear, pity, admiration, disgust, and compassion" (Plantinga, 2009: 86). Steven Shaviro in *Post-Cinematic Affect* presents a case for the inclusion of these types of emotion, pointing out the significance in the value of affective experiences. Hence, "our existence is always bound up with affective and aesthetic flows that elude cognitive definition or capture" (Shaviro, 2010: 4). He presents affect as being counter-representational in nature, because, as stated previously by Massumi (2002: 30), affect is non-conscious. It is therefore reasonable to deduce that in order that a cognitive element be representational, it must be intentional and therefore conscious. Here lies thus, the greatest contrast between emotion and affect; the former is informed by theories and philosophies of representation and consciousness and the latter, though informed by theories, is elusive of representation and is nonconscious.

Greg Singh also explores the importance of affect in film. In *Feeling Film: Affect and Authenticity in Popular Cinema*, he makes an important distinction between affect and 'sensation':

> Sensation is perhaps more typically identifiable in terms of engaging environmental detail, structuring our responses to experience of the world and helping us order it. Affect tends to signify a more unconscious feeling-function in that it has the capacity to let content erupt into the conscious [a process known in psychotherapy as 'invasion'] but also serves the purpose of managing the permeability between conscious and unconscious material. (Singh, 2014: 21)

Here Singh asserts that sensation relies on real-world experiences, and affect helps to gauge it, though unintentionally. Seemingly, the former is more organised than the latter. Sensation can be compared to the bodily experience of mood as a form of affect as well as to Smith's *social constructivist theories* in discussing the interconnectedness of the human processing of bodily and cognitive functioning. The engagement of mood is very closed in nature in that it relies solely on a feeling towards an object, which, although long lasting, does not lead to a further action. The closed nature of mood is not in the specificity of the object, which is loosely structured as argued by Goldie, but in its manifestation. In other words, mood is dependent on an already existing expressive action while sensation is open in nature in that it is not limited to an existing bodily experience but other factors such as the environment that help shape such actions. This leads to a comparison between sensation and the social constructivist theories. Smith notes that expressive outcome (emotion) is shaped through socialisation, which determines response. Similarly, in the case of sensation, it uses an existing ideological construction, not unlike a bodily one, in order to determine response and understand the object of such a response. The engagement with such terms discussed here are important as it will help in understanding the relationship between cognition and film and how a certain form of cognition is made available to the audience through such criteria.

In his books *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), philosopher Gilles Deleuze offers major contributions about the affective experience of film. He describes affect as an entity, characterised by "quality and power" (Deleuze, 1983: 97). He explains that affect "is not a sensation, a feeling [or] an idea, but the quality of a possible sensation, feeling or idea" (Deleuze, 1983: 98). By this, Deleuze implies that film—through which an effective experience can be realised—holds within it, a certain value that can be used in a number of ways. For instance, it can be used to express a state (propositional affect). It can also be used to express relational affects (actualised affects) such as sound (Deleuze, 1985: 164). Deleuze's stance on the uses of affect is buttressed by Plantinga (1999) and Singh (2014). As he notes, affect "does not exist independently of something which expresses it, although it is completely distinct from it" (Deleuze, 1983: 97). So, while X (affect) is a part of Y (emotion) and is triggered by Y; the components and mode of manifestations of X are also different from Y. The same is true for mood, although mood is not completely distinct from its expressive action. Deleuze's use of affect also falls under the centrist notion that the concept of affect is valued as a mode of thought.

Baruch Spinoza also argues that affect can be inferred through the movement of bodies, and this movement in turn, alters the dimensions of each body. This thesis adopts Plantinga, Singh, Deleuze and Spinoza's notion of affect as movement and knowledge and its interventionist/invasive nature in affecting the modes of perceptual power that knowledge brings. It also means that the thesis will engage the terms of a cinematic image in a different way to standard cognitive screen theory. When applied to the cinematic image, Deleuze's affect—or the "Spinozist affect" as Felicity Colman (2011: 85) describes it—and affection-image convey "quality or power [and is potentially] considered for itself as expressed. The corresponding sign is therefore expression, not actualisation" (Deleuze, 1983: 98). Furthermore, the affect and affection-image are also "impersonal and […] distinct from every individuated form of things" (ibid.). As this thesis argues, the *quality of possible sensation, feeling or idea* that Deleuze refers to have no concrete forms in themselves; it is valued only in relation to culturally or politically produced of controlled forms such as film and music. It is only in these forms that qualities are actualised, appreciated, and valued.

2.3.3. Affect and Film Formalism

There are other cases for affect that depart from the common arguments about its use in film. Such arguments explore the relationship between form and affect as well as the situation of affect in film (through the experiencing subject or cinematic object of such affects). Brinkema

critiques contemporary film studies and demands "the total redefining of formalism in and for film studies" (Brinkema, 2014: 36). To achieve this, she calls on the discipline to "dethrone the subject and the spectator" (ibid.). In comparison to film-as-text, Brinkema suggests that more close readings need to be carried out on the textual forms of films. She then goes on to connect film formalism with the concept of affect, hence the title of the book *The Forms of the Affects*. Her arguments tend to focus on the readings of specific forms (style) and specific affects. She argues that scholars like Shaviro, Massumi and Deleuze are wrong to insist that affects are something to be experienced by a viewing subject and notes that scholars continue to depend heavily to *bodies* affected by affects.

Indeed Plantinga, as previously explained, insists that while the bodily process is an important aspect of cognition, it does tend to undermine cognition in film theory and philosophy. He, however, does not afford any hierarchical positions to other aspects of cognition in the manner that Brinkema affords film formalism as the most significant aspect of affect. He also does not claim that affect can be experienced by any means other than a viewing subject. Brinkema makes the distinctive argument that affects are to be found exteriorised *in* and *as* a text. Hence, she recognises "any individual affect as a self-folding exteriority that manifests in, as, and with textual form" (Brinkema, 2014: 25). This means that affects are not solely established within the audience, rather, they are intricately linked with the formal structures and techniques adopted in the artwork (film texts). To restate the question posed in Chapter 2.3.2 about the: *where is affect in film?* Brinkema would argue that affect is located primarily in the object (textual and formal elements) that conveys the story in the film. She posits that affects do not need an experiencing subject, and as such, there are formal elements that are themselves affects. There are issues with this argument that will be discussed shortly, however.

Susanne Langer makes a similar argument in *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953). She suggests that there is a similarity between art form and human emotion and thus:

> The tonal structures we call "music" bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses—not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. (Langer, 1953: 27)

In Langer's view, the way music is structured is *analogous* or *isomorphic* to the feeling of transience. Hence:

> Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life. Such formal analogy, or congruence of logical structures, is the prime requisite for the relation between a symbol and whatever it is to mean. The symbol and the object symbolised must have some common logical form. (Langer, 1953: 27)

Unlike Langer's argument which never goes as far as identifying a specific emotion like sadness (she rather refers to general patterns of affective experiences to feelings and not concrete emotions), Brinkema ventures further by not only maintaining that filmic structures resemble the structures of affects but adds that specific filmic structures resemble specific affects like joy or disgust.

Brinkema suggests that certain filmic structures are affects. In other words, the way a certain film is structured is itself, affect. She cites Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (2007) as an example, noting that "in place of grief as the expression of a psychologically deep character […], form itself takes up the peculiarly painful suffering, gives it shape, weight, intensity, and force" (Brinkema, 2012: 99). Her aim here is to analyse grief not in terms of narrative content, but as a matter of form, composition, and structure. This means that she separates narrative content from form. Brinkema concludes that:

> As grief is the very form […] that configures the film after death of the child, *Funny Games* is not about grief or grieving. Rather, it brings to light the force of the affect *as* its visual and temporal form. It would not be a misstatement to say that it is the form of Haneke's film above all that grieves. (Brinkema, 2014: 100)

While scholars like Plantinga (2009) and Goldie (2000) may argue that a film is "expressive of" grief, Brinkema asserts that a filmic form is able to grieve.

Brinkema's last argument lends itself to poetic jargon, hence undermining her argument here: if *grief*, elicited from death in *Funny Games*, is the element that enables affect in form, and therefore form to exist as affect—specifically of visual style—and is eventually replaced by the object of the grief within the narrative process in the film, then grief *exteriorised as*, and expressed through form cannot exist without the subjects of grief (screen characters). In other words, in a filmic context, the film characters had to experience the *death of the child* in order for the specific mood of *grief* to be expressed (if at all possible) through form itself. Therefore, not only does affect need an experiencing body, but it would need to be *interiorised within* the text. Moreover, dismissing the role that an experiencing body and the formal technique of narrative content play in cognition, and replacing the idea with the *embodied affect* of an abstract idea such as form seems untenable. If form could feel, why would it matter? In what way does this benefit cognitive discourse, or contribute to the overall affective experience of film? What parameters should be used by the audience in order to identify this? Per Spinoza and Deleuze's *movement of bodies* and *affection-image*, there is a direct impact on audience's affective experience of film through cognition, formal techniques, as well as through the intentions of the filmmaker, to create a vehicle for affect for the internalisation of the audience. Importantly, the difference between a mere footage and a film is the application of formal techniques, both narrative and stylistic. These include choices made by the filmmaker through the use of such forms as sound, narrative, editing and mise-en-scène. It is the way in which

such elements are assembled, and the filmic patterns they produce, that creates a film's affect. The contention with Brinkema's stance is not with the argument that form produces affect and meaning, but with the idea that the elements existing within form are themselves able to experience affects.

To analogise Brinkema's argument: affective quality is not to be found in the message within the bottle, but in the bottle as the message; that is, the means through which the message has been sent (the form and structure of the film) is in itself, the message (affect). A few points could be made about the contribution of the bottle to the message here, but a conclusion that any emotions or responses are from the form itself certainly raises a few issues. Thus, it is one thing to say that the bottle (through which the message enclosed has been sent) potentially triggers mystery (towards the object) or interest (embodied in the subject) as subtexts for an expressive outcome (emotion), by the subject of the message; and it is another to suggest that the bottle is itself mysterious. While the latter assertion is logical, it holds no pathway for objectivity in meaning without the context of the message in the bottle, because it has failed to decode the message carried within it. For one to posit that the bottle itself is mysterious, it would seem to be based solely on the premise that it contains in it, a message. It is therefore reasonable to assert, rather, that the bottle is a message *within* a message because such qualities of the bottle cannot be valued independently of the message that it holds within it. And so, while Brinkema's argument that affects are to be found exteriorised *in* a text is feasible, it is proves unjustifiable within film theory to assert that affects manifest separately as textual form.

A more cogent argument would be to describe form as a metaphor for the qualities and manifestations of affect, rather than as existing *as* affect. In Kevin Smith's 1994 film, *Clerks*, for example, he uses title texts before the introduction of a new character or the introduction of a new tone, theme or event in the film. The audience is thus compelled to make meaning of each title as it relates to unfolding events and respond to each scene accordingly. Hence, the textual cues employed in the film influences/manifests in the experiencing bodies. Smith's textual cues guide and contribute towards the intensity of the affective experience of film. Crucially, it is the experiencing bodies within the filmic space that ultimately produce affective qualities that then elicit emotive responses in the audience. The form may serve as a door, but the subject of the text (the audience) as well as the subject of the affect (the audience) are the key that unlocks a level of intensity that produces such phenomena as mood, reflexes, responses, and pleasures. Aspects of cognition, emotion and affect in films such as *Clerks* will be explored more broadly in Chapter 4.

There is no doubt that audiences look for meaning in film. These meanings may be implicit and explicit. The former suggests that meaning lies beneath the surface. It is "an

interpretation, connection, or inference we make on the basis of that what we see" (Mooney, 2013: 6). The latter suggests what we see on the surface; it is also in reference to "a plot summary or basic description" (ibid.). The implicit meaning of a text is only valued when an active viewer explores the deeper meaning of a text. As such, in *Clerks*, the explicit meaning involves a man whose uneventful day takes a left turn, starting with the news that his ex-girlfriend has died; implicitly however, the meaning could be associated more with the stages of human interaction and the implications of mediocrity. A film's implicit meaning is arguably linked to the film's formal composition as well as philosophical ideas. While it is important to discuss the intention of the filmmaker in proffering certain formal techniques in certain ways, it is arguably the case that the filmmaker may be unaware of the implicit meanings birthed by said techniques. This therefore justifies the Deleuzian position previously taken, that the *quality of possible sensation, feeling or idea* is valued only in relation to culturally or politically produced of controlled forms; that meaning takes on a life of its own and is subject to deep personal issues (feelings) or cultural prejudices.

In the interests of clarity and for the purpose of this thesis, what follows are several of the key arguments, and perhaps a temporary stance on cognitive film theory. Firstly, emotion is intentional, temporary, and confined to the object. Emotion represents the relationship between a person and an object. Emotion is not congruent with an intent to exhibit emotion, but of the intent to direct said emotion at something. Filmic emotion is temporary and is therefore not sustainable outside the filmic space. Secondly, emotion and affect require form because affect requires meaning. Affect does not require an object, but instead, requires a subject because form cannot exist without subject. Therefore, affect requires form and subject, and they cannot exist independently of one another where film text is involved. In the context of film, the object of an affect, is the final body of the affect, which could be the film audience or screen characters, and it is through the final body that a revelation of the meanings and impact of the subject are made possible. Lastly, affect cannot be derived from form without the proposition of such, from an experiencing/ viewing subject. *The body* must experience affect in order that forms producing affect be valued.

2.3.4. Theorising Emotion and Affect in Independent Cinema

In this section of the thesis, an exploration into the key arguments within cognitive studies have been considered to evaluate how the concept of emotion and affect can be valued and theorised in cinema. Moving away from ideas of feelings towards phenomenology and audience reception studies, there have been considerations made about how 'imaging/imagining of

emotion', music and sound, 'the experience of time, space and movement' (spatio-temporal system), 'bodily senses', 'bodily and cognitive functioning', emotional response; and such notions as 'paradox of negative emotion', formalism and aesthetic qualities contribute to the emotive and affective experience of film. This section has touched on the differences between emotion and affect as being subject to representation and consciousness: the former is intentional and directed towards an object and the latter simply is not. The section has also looked at the other forms that emotion as well as affect take, such as feeling, mood and sensation, and how these forms differ from the latter concepts as well as how they are manifested, elicited and sustained.

A *quality* descriptor has been used several times in discussing cognitive theory, to refer to such concepts as emotion, affect and the text. This thesis has adapted the term when referencing the natural state, or the resulting outcome of such concepts. For example, it has explained that the emotional quality of a film could be derived from an integration of film form with cognition. In relation to affect, it has been used synonymously with affect's nature, that is, its "contextual" (Massumi, 2002: 30), "unconscious" (Singh, 2014: 21) and "unintentional" (Plantinga, 2009: 87) nature, embodying such "quality and power" (Deleuze, 1983: 97). Hence, in this thesis, such elements as Music are argued to be an *affective affect*, because music adds context to an already contextualised state. Hence, film elements such as music arguably perform two functions: it not only unfolds context of moving imagery with its interaction to it, but it also serves as a tool for measuring the intensity/affective experience from said imagery. That is, music is not only affective in the components that accompany such an element, but in the way it mimics affect's nature—unconsciously—managing the permeability of the music. This thesis has also questioned the *quality* marker in relation to the text, specifically as a positive connotation. In relation to filmic emotion, it notes that the way emotion functions could depend on the quality of the text but that what could be characterised as a quality (or good) film will always be subject to individual criticisms. This thesis will continue to examine the quality of film texts through an exploration of the ways in which formal techniques are used in such texts.

A justification for considering filmic emotion and everyday emotion as functioning in a similar manner—constructed or otherwise, has also been made, as they both rely on the *emotion system* (Smith, 2003) and as well as an ability to *unfold context* (Massumi, 2002) in order to decode meaning. Additionally, it has been argued that the complex nature of emotion materialised in and through film as well as in the real world and the differences thereof, serve no significant value to the inquiry of the thesis. Thus, through cognitive theory, the thesis is able to circumvent the subjectivity surrounding the *inner workings* of emotion within both

perspectives. In the process, the thesis challenges Susan Feagin's structural analysis of emotion and concludes that although there is logic in structure to consider every-day emotions are loosely framed as opposed to the tightly-framed nature of filmic emotions, such an analysis does prevent both forms of emotion from being understood from a single approach mostly because both manifestations as co-dependent: filmic emotion relies on *the real*; and the cognitive mechanisms (mental process) required by both forms are not only the same but are in themselves different from the structure of said emotional form. Thus, the thesis continues to argue that the event (structure) is less consequential as the outcome (meaning and emotion) of an event.

Since the definition, meaning and understanding of independent cinema are constructed through film studies and criticisms as well as through ongoing discussions, debates, and interpretations from socially authorised groups (such as filmmakers and academics), it means that there are diverse perspectives and interpretations of what constitutes independent cinema's identity. Tzioumakis notes that "numerous sub-groups within […] institutions have appropriated the term independent in order to achieve particular objectives as well as define the field" (Tzioumakis, 2006: 11). The Discourse approach is particularly important as it accounts for all different forms and expressions of independent filmmaking. In principle, the concept of cinema as discourse *solves* the problem of having to proffer a static or fixed definition of independent cinema for which there is none.

Thus far, the thesis has utilised the concept of discourse mainly in two different ways: (a) to trace its independent cinema's transformation in different historical contexts; and (b) to highlight the key issues within independent cinema through critical engagement. In addition to these approaches, the thesis will continue to explore independent cinema as a discourse. It will do so by examining the socio-political and cultural contexts that reveal the intricacies and multifaceted nature of independent cinema's character and significance while also fostering a deeper understanding of the ideological and social landscape of the cinema. It will also approach the concept of discourse in independent cinema by continuing to explore critical ideas relating to cognitive film theory. This will serve as a way of understanding how such concepts help to shape independent's identity through components such as aesthetic expression and audience engagement.

Further considerations have been made with regards to affect, foregrounding the role of the audience as the *final body* for affective experiences; and the text as manifestation of affect within the spatiotemporal system, due to the qualities of affect as laid out above. In order for this thesis to theorise affect in film, it is particularly important to limit the exploration of how it is manifested in a way that is understandable. Hence, echoing specifically, the text (film and

form) as the subject for affective manifestation as well as the object for the elicitation of emotional response to film, the thesis prioritises affect as a "felt bodily state" (Plantinga, 2009: 86) but one that primarily exists in filmic bodies through the audience's engagement with film form. In order words, the audience is able to feel a character's state of distress because they have engaged with the film forms and elements surrounding such an emotion.

The approach taken regarding the text as the site of affect is not automatically extended to the concept of emotion because emotions function differently: they are "intentional" because they require an object and they "represent a relationship between a person and [their] environment" (Plantinga, 2009: 87). This means that the audience, the film and the filmmaker are all prioritised in order to theorise emotion in film, with the representational nature of emotion allowing for such an approach. It has also been noted in Chapter 2.3.2 that a case could be made for the manifestation of affect in other components of film such as in the intentions of the filmmaker as well as in the audience, although the possible affective experience of the film (through audience engagement with the text itself) will be given priority in this thesis. As the thesis will continue to show, even with such an approach taken with regards to affect, it is inevitable that other manifestations of affect outside of the component of the text will be highlighted in some form or another when discussing the affective experience of film, particularly with regards to the audience.

2.3.5. The Role of Philosophy in Shaping Cognitive, Emotive and Affective Responses in Contemporary American Independent Cinema

Bruce Russell explores the philosophical limits of film in *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures* by suggesting that:

> [F]ilm cannot establish a philosophical thesis. This will […] be true if all philosophical theses are claims that something is necessarily true, say, that necessarily, happiness is an intrinsic good or that necessarily, if you know something you are justified in believing it. No one can establish that something holds in all possible worlds by presenting an example or two from a possible world depicted in film. (Russell, 2006: 389–390)

Here, he implies that film has the tendency to proffer philosophical problems in that it can show us what is possible and at the same time, fails to show what is *probable*.

David Bordwell also highlights the limitations of the psychological enquiry of film. As he notes:

> Throughout history, filmmakers have worked with seat-of-the-pants psychology. By trial and error, they have learned how to shape our minds and feelings, but usually they aren't interested in explaining why they succeed. They leave that task to film scholars, psychologists, and others. (Bordwell, 2013: 29)

Through questioning the psychological reasonings for filmmakers' creative choices and their objective, if any, in shaping our emotional response, he explains that "we watch films with our

eyes and ears, but we experience films with our minds and bodies. […] It plants hints; we remember them. It prompts us to feel emotions; we feel them" (ibid.). Thus, he identifies the cognitive/affective processes through which the audience engages with—and interprets—film.

One crucial argument on the relationship between philosophy and film comes from John Mullarkey (*New Takes in Film-Philosophy*) who argues for a 'de-philosophising' of cinema and poses the following questions:

> Why is film becoming increasingly important to philosophers? Is it only because it can be a helpful tool in teaching philosophy, in illustrating it? Or is it because film can also think for itself, because it can create its own philosophy? (Mullarkey in Carel and Tuck, 2011: 87)

He expands on this argument, stating that, "a popular claim amongst film-philosophers is that film is no mere handmaiden to philosophy, that it does more than simply illustrate philosophical texts: rather, film itself can philosophise film" (Mullarkey, 2011: 87). A simple interpretation of this argument would be that art does not merely imitate life but itself; that art can be theorised through its own value.

One of the criticisms of the concept of philosophy in film—while seeking to understand the ways it functions and is valued in film—is addressing the language of philosophy. Robert Sinnerbrink emerges with two concepts of film and philosophy in *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images*: "(1) *philosophy of film*, a theoretical explanatory approach to analysing the nature of film and of film experience; and (2) *film-philosophy*, an aesthetic, self-reflective, interpretative way of thinking" (Sinnerbrink, 2011:7). This thesis will adopt both concepts in order to understand the relationship between philosophy and film. This is because the philosophy of film conceptually analyses and theorises film precisely because *film-philosophy* cannot do so. However, the philosophy of film does not extend to human psychology to the extent that film-philosophy does. Sinnerbrink's first concept of film and philosophy belongs in the "theories of [film]" (ibid.) approach that seeks to provide a "conceptual definition of empirical investigation into, or philosophical criticism of theories claiming to account for [film]" (ibid.). The latter conception then seeks to aesthetically reveal and perhaps, transform our film experience of the modern world by questioning the common tendency to again, philosophically privilege conceptual theorisation over film aesthetics.

There is arguably a range of aesthetic approaches adopted by different filmmakers to carry certain levels of emotive and affective appeals and experiences that are offered to specific audiences in the same way that they adopt certain filmic elements when dealing with a specific genre, however unconsciously, of generic conventions. Hence through aesthetics, a Richard Linklater film *feels* like a Linklater film to the audience, a David Lynch film *feels* like a Lynch film and a Wes Anderson film *feels* like an Anderson film. This essentially means that there is a potential for an audience to become so emotionally engaged with the hallmarks of a set of

films by a certain filmmaker, to the extent that they create a value for those films. Part of the inquiry in this thesis is to establish just what the nature of these aesthetic paradigms are. This is not to presume that independent films are wholly independent of one another. As already suggested through the exploration of both Independent and Hollywood cinema, there is a collective repertoire of meaning that runs through films, and the thesis will continue to demonstrate this through the element of philosophy as a means of interpreting films or aspects of film texts.

Within any film content, regardless of its dominant storyline, narrative and character elements from other texts are at work. As this thesis will show, films are inherently philosophically hybrid in nature. One can utilise a philosophical framework to interpret different texts or some aspects of a text in order to find a setting, a context and a complication for its narratives. One could argue that filmmakers have a set of *buttons* they push to instantly elicit certain emotions in film, evoke a need for meaning, or heighten the levels of intensity (affect) in such film. However, this appears to suggest that the construction of emotion in film is merely contingent and improvisational; a cinematic mode of construction with no coherent structure, no reasoning behind it beyond the demands of the film and its immediate impact on an audience. This would ultimately imply that an audience's emotional engagement with film texts is merely feigned and existing only in the confines of the cinematic space. In his study of the films of Robert Bresson, Paul Schrader argues that moviegoers love emotional constructs and "emotional involvements with artificial screens" (Schrader, 2009: 145). He makes reference to Bresson's 1951 film *Diary of a Country Priest,* noting that viewers who leave the cinema because they feel that the film is "boring" (ibid.) have a poor perception of the film, though the attitude of the viewer is understandable. Schrader adds that these sets of viewers are mistaking the "every day for transcendental style" (Schrader, 2009: 145) whereas the viewers who stay consciously or subconsciously, "recognise that there is more than the everyday" (Schrader, 2009: 145).

In his earlier work, *Transcendental Style in Film - Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer,* he explains transcendental style in film as not being "intrinsically transcendental" (Schrader, 1972: 3), but it nevertheless "represents a way to approach the Transcendent" (ibid.). Furthermore, this audience-targeted form:

> [W]as not determined by film-makers' personalities, culture, politics, economics, or morality. It is instead the result of two universal contingencies: the desire to express the Transcendent in art and the nature of the film medium. In the final result, no other factors can give this style its universality. (Schrader, 1972: 3)

The argument previously made in the discussion of cognitive theory about the nature of emotion construction is given credence by Schrader's use of the 'everyday'. As he explains:

> One of the dangers of the everyday is that it may become a screen in itself, a style rather than a stylisation, an end rather than a means. The everyday eliminates the obvious emotional constructs but tacitly posits a rational one: that the world is predictable, ordered, cold. Disparity undermines the rational construct. (Schrader, 2009: 145)

It is the stance of this thesis that emotive and affective constructs in film, through the element of philosophy, are more than an assemblage of clichéd stock gestures, that this construct is systematic and transcends pushing a button or proffering cues in film experience, and that the philosophical element in film is a major force, shaping the interpretation of film texts.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY|

So far, the thesis has identified and examined scholarly works on American independent cinema Hollywood cinema, Cognitive Film Theory and Philosophy. Arguments surrounding cinema identity have been explored through the lens of historical analysis, industry dynamics, and critical engagement with the key issues surrounding independent cinema. Important questions were raised in the introductory section of the thesis. To reiterate, the thesis proffered questions on how contemporary independent cinema be understood, and what useful distinctions can be drawn between its identity in relation to Hollywood cinema.

As the thesis has suggested, film can be approached from a wide variety of positions such as the industrial (Meritt, 2000); the aesthetic (King, 2002); the psychoanalytic (Kord and Krimmer, 2011) and the structuralist (Maltby, 2003). Many scholars have tackled independent film from some of these positions over the years to provide a comprehensive theory to cinema aesthetics. Critically, scholars like Carl Plantinga, Greg M. Smith, Noël Carroll and Jeff Smith adopt cognitive film theory in order to advance theoretical ideas on film and emotion, and in so doing, offer a useful framework to begin thinking about independent cinema and emotion. Plantinga's emphasis on 'closeup' shots, Greg Smith's work on music, Carroll's attention to affective dimensions of the text and Jeff Smith's exploration of mood-cues will help in the consideration of how we might think about emotion and independent cinema.

There seems to be a widely acknowledged principle that although independent films emerged due to specific economic and socio-cultural changes in the United States—with practices which would initially become antithetical to Hollywood films—that the line between both systems is generally rather blurred today, both economically and aesthetically. The reader will recall that the thesis aims to explore independent cinema as a discourse by examining the socio-political and cultural contexts of film identity. It also aims to broaden the concepts introduced in Chapter 2.3 and underscore their role in shaping meaning in film as well as the identity of cinema.

The reader will also recall that one of the main aims of the thesis is to theorise the concepts of emotion and affect in cinema. Thus, it will analyse some key components of cinema (such as narrative structure, visual storytelling, and aesthetics) as well as some formal elements (such as theme, editing, lighting, mise-en-scène and music). It will then analyse questions about how meaning in film is offered to an audience through the concepts of emotion and affect. The thesis will take into account, the arguments of scholars such as those mentioned above to show how the emotive and affective qualities in independent films, through aesthetics, offers a means

through which differences in film practices between both systems can be understood. Through textual analysis, the thesis will explore such practices from a theoretical perspective.

3.1. The Validity of Textual Analysis

In approaching the inquiry of this thesis through textual analysis, and in discussing the audience, emotion and affect in relation to film, it is important to note why the approach of reception studies is not used in the thesis as a model for such discussions. Textual analysis reveals what meanings and affects and are made available in film and how they are communicated through aesthetics in a way that is effective. It does this rather than directly expose the intention of the filmmaker and how such intentions are received by an audience, and crucially, rather than a concrete suggestion of what a text means, but what meanings are offered in the film. Consequently, this approach detaches the filmmaker—partly or entirely— from the text; to the extent that the filmmaker is not responsible in a sense, for what meanings are derived from the text. Nevertheless, criticisms emerge through textual readings, based on what meanings are proffered in such texts. It is a rather futile approach to attempt to decipher the intentions of the filmmaker (and hence how such intentions are received and understood by the audience) as justification for an absolute meaning of a text. This is because often times, meanings and interpretations are created unintentionally by the filmmaker, owning to the fact that the filmmaker adopts formal devices in the filmmaking process, that are in themselves loosely structured (because there is no one method to engaging them in filmmaking), and are therefore loosely utilised, thereby creating a variety of meanings.

Adopting the approach of theory and contextualisation within the method of textual analysis proves effective in this thesis because it involves the text (film) itself, and the text involves meaning due to its *literariness* and ability to invoke affect through the qualities that have been explored so far in this thesis. To restate, in addition to its ability to evoke emotions, feelings and affects, there are abstract qualities of film itself such as sound and movement which are themselves affective in manner (how they are used), but also in nature (how they exist). Textual analysis is also relevant to the inquiry of this thesis as it involves analysis of certain filmic concepts, and as such, involve a close examination of the elements and structure of a film. In his lecture on 'The Persistence of Textual Analysis' (2016), Professor Richard Dyer discusses how such elements are individually important to the whole film. He notes that "no individual element of a film has meaning except in relation to those immediately surrounding it and in the whole film—but also the whole film only consists of tiny […] moments […] [and] tiny details" (Dyer, 2006). Thus, in order to understand and also identify

the available meanings of the text, it is crucial that the audience "recognise the parts and the whole" (ibid.) that symbolise the elements and structures that make up the film. The use of textual analysis in this thesis does not suggest that the analysis proffered in it is in anyway an attempt to *solve* the *problems* of selected texts, neither that it is an interpretation for what could be considered the *true* meaning of the text. The thesis does not propose that there is an objective standard through which meaning can be sought or understood. Again, it is simply to recognise what meanings and interpretations can be derived emotionally and affectively, as evidenced by the text itself.

The thesis then moves to discover how such availabilities within the text can be theorised as a practice-based identity of film. There is an obvious problem that arises here and, in many ways, attempting to theorise subjective notions relating to cognition could be potentially seen as unscientific and impossible. Since textual analysis affords the opportunity of contextualisation and theory, it means that whatever identifications highlighted with regards to values proffered through a text will be difficult to theorise. However, the aim of the thesis is not merely to theorise meanings, affects and emotions in film, but to theorise *how* such provisions, made available through the exploitation of formal components, are a useful way of identifying aesthetics, in and of a cinematic system. This involves an initial recognition of the qualities of such provisions—which have been highlighted and discussed in the previous chapter—and then identifying how such qualities are manifested through aesthetics, in both the Independent and Hollywood systems of production.

3.2. Research Techniques

To consider the *quality* debate and hence the way emotions, affects and meanings are offered in film, the thesis emphasises three criteria: aesthetics, representation, and ideology. The thesis proposes film form and ideology as a means of analysing emotion in film. On film form, Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell in *A Dictionary of Film Studies* explain that:

> "[…] formal elements may be divided into those relating to narrative […] and those relating to film style (camera angle, camera movement, editing, colour, sound, etc.). Taken together, the formal components of a film give the work its distinctive shape and character. (Kuhn and Westwell, 2020: 264)

Hence, formal elements such as camera movement, framing, spatial organisation and music, alongside formal components such as narrative, dialogue, sound (or lack thereof), and performance enable the audience to acquire, organise, analyse and utilise meaning in film. Following the discussion of the situation of affect in a cinematic context, film affect in this thesis will serve as a consequence of the range of meanings and interpretations made available in film to the audience. It was explained in Chapter 2.3.2 that affect can be situated in several

bodies that make up the film: the text, the intentions of the filmmaker as well as the audience. This thesis nonetheless prioritises the text as *the body* for the manifestation of affect, and the audience as *the subject* of such affects. Hence, the subject of affect specifically, will be theorised textually and such textual affects embody form and subject. It has also been mentioned in the discussion on Cognitive Film Theory that emotion functions differently depending on several probabilities, including the film genre. Additionally, it could also depend on a certain quality of the text. An assessment of the quality debate within film studies, using the three aforementioned criteria, aims to work towards how we might theorise emotion and affect in independent cinema.

The thesis will move away from ideas involving phenomenology and audience reception studies, to focus on the formal qualities in the text, in addition to considerations on how elements of storytelling, music, tone, style, time and space function in film as a means of eliciting emotion in the audience. The thesis will examine how aesthetics, philosophical and ideological connotations in film contributes to its meaning through its propensity to provide emotional value. Susan Feagin notes that, "philosophy rushes in where common-sense fears to tread, raising questions and looking for explanations" (Feagin, 1988: 485). Hence, philosophy is utilised in the thesis as a means of understanding the arguments surrounding the usefulness of philosophical principles, such as Nihilism, in film. The concept also serves to highlight how a philosophical idea can structure our interpretation and engagement with film. Ideas such as realism, illusionism, along with philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze, prove useful here. With aesthetics at the forefront of film analysis, the thesis attempts to show how ideological interpretations through concepts such as sentimentalism, identification, passivism, can be valuable ways of engaging with, and understanding emotions in film texts.

The thesis will adopt the theoretical ideas outlined thus far to consider specific case studies—on films that claim to both illustrate and challenge some of the prevailing historical ideas about the development of American cinema in recent decades. It will textually analyse the aesthetic qualities in selected independent films alongside specific Hollywood films, through the works of certain film directors who have worked in both the Independent and Hollywood systems of production, broken away from independent filmmaking, and achieved some mainstream success. Several chapters in sections two and three deal with multiple films in varying degrees of detail. Of course, some films will be examined more closely than others, depending on the level of analysis necessary to the subject, but the thesis will retain coverage of a reasonably wide and representative range of films. For example, in discussing independent film culture and representation, the thesis will focus primarily on independent films that move away from the primary case studies of the thesis. Films such as *Poison* (1991, Todd Haynes),

Tape (2001, Richard Linklater) and *Midsommar* (2019, Ari Aster) will lay the groundwork for how the elements of storytelling, narrative structure and music serve to inform our ideological/emotional/cognitive understanding and engagement with film. Preliminary research on film and emotion suggests that it would be possible to focus a thesis solely on the emotion system of independent film (the thesis will in fact achieve this in chapters 4 and 5). In this thesis however, such an approach will not answer the main question raised in this thesis, particularly revolving around a practice-based identity of film. Hence, there will need to be a determination on how to accommodate such manifestations of emotion and affect in Hollywood films, to determine if and how such qualities are a useful means of differentiating film practices/ ideological provisions in both sectors.

It should be noted that although the films examined in Section Three of the thesis have been selected in the context of certain filmmakers, such films are not examined from the perspective of them. The basis for this methodology is governed solely by the production system in which such films exist. For example, Steven Soderbergh's Sex*, Lies, and Videotape* by Miramax Films and *Contagion* by Warner Bros. Pictures are featured in this thesis. The consideration of Soderberg's films is based solely on the premise that both films have been made in two separate production sectors. The methodology then provides a prism through which the thesis might explore emotional and affective provisions in film. The thesis does not aim to show that there is a connection to be made between auteurism and cognitive film theory, but that in identifying films from filmmakers who have worked between both film sectors, there will be provisions of an effective approach into the ways in which meaning is offered— and film quality is produced—to the audience. As already suggested in the exploration of Hollywood Cinema in Chapter 2.2, the approach to film in terms of the industrial system initially accounts for two categories: big-budget international productions as well as smaller-budget productions (that rely very little on the international market). It is through this categorisation in film practice, that questions of the emotive and affective qualities offered in the film will be explored in this thesis. Hence, the methodology of employing films from directors who have directed films within these two categories helps limit what films the thesis will explore.

An attempt to address a method for the limitation of case study films does not suggest a clear-cut categorisations of both film sectors by way of industrial categorisations. As Chapter 4.1 will demonstrate, the budgetary principles that shroud the independent sector are always evolving, although such budgets remain smaller in comparison to Hollywood productions. Emmanuel Levy in *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film* posits that it accounts for why 'independent' as a term continues to thrive in contemporary film discourse,

because it is a "sufficiently flexible" (Levy, 1999: 6). On the case study films also: while such selections are made from specific filmmakers, the choices of individual films within such a model are themselves random. This allows for a flexible exploration of film texts within such a structured model. Indeed, it will show that any one film within such a model can be analysed textually through an application of the concept of Cognitive Film Theory to understanding film practices. The case study films within this specific model to address the question of systemic practices include *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989, Steven Soderbergh), *Contagion* (2011, Steven Soderbergh), *John Q.* (2002, Nick Cassavetes), *My Sister's Keeper* (2009, Nick Cassavetes), *Black Swan*, (2010, Darren Aronofsky) and *Mother!* (2017, Darren Aronofsky). A discernible question that arises with working within any film sector will revolve around creative control and the extent to which personal vision plays a role in the filmmaking process and, consequently, the aesthetic and emotional constructions available in such films to appeal to certain audiences. Through ideological reading combined with detailed textual analysis, the thesis hopes to give an insight into how emotion is characteristically elicited in the above independent and mainstream films.

Although owning to an arbitrary method on film selection within a specific model, the selection of some individual films within such a structure is governed by a few motivations with some assortment, owning to their generally demonstrated positions of importance within their filmmaking practice. In order words, it is valuable to write a chapter on the identity of independent cinema with reference to, for example, *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. In other instances, films such as *My Sister's Keeper* have been selected because it conforms to the specific model adopted for creating a pathway for theorising emotion and affect in film, and not for any considerations about specific qualities or criticisms of the film specifically. Nevertheless, such films serve a significant purpose, if not in their randomness, then as basis for the theorisation of emotion and affect in film through their filmic elements; and when considered alongside its indie counterpart from the same film director, provides a broader understanding about how film elements are not only considered in filmmaking, but used to elicit emotion through such films to a specific kind of audience.

Textual reading of the case study films also begins to show how emotion and affect are produced, understood, and valued within film. Although it is possible to theorise emotion in many film genres, such as comedy, horror, and drama, the thesis has chosen to limit the case studies to a study of the emotion system rooted in the *quality* criteria previously mentioned: aesthetics (to include film form, narrative structure, and theme), representation (to include subject matter) and ideology (relating to narrative structure and emotional engagement). To approach broader questions of emotional response to film texts through the lens of ideology in

narratives, the thesis will adopt notions relating to aesthetic emotion, significant form, affective programmes, quality film, the active/passive viewer and smart film. The thesis will achieve such explorations through an initial investigation of the relevant concepts which deal with cognitive film theory and aesthetics as it relates to selected independent films and then extend such concepts into the examination of ideological concepts such as sentimentalism, sustainability, and emotional engagement in order to provide relevant insight into the way such concepts are provided in Independent and Hollywood cinemas as a way of explain the various emotional and affective experience of cinema and the relationship it establishes between the film and the viewer, existing as both subject and object of emotion and affect. Such approaches will help in investigating as well as linking the principles of ideology to cognitive film theory and how such an approach influences emotional engagement to film and perhaps, more importantly, what meanings are made available within and outside a specific political culture.

The comprehensive use of illustrations from selected films in this thesis ensures that the reader is able to draw on such illustrations in order to confirm the validity of the ideas being discussed, or at least, to contend with propositions made in the thesis through such illustrations. The illustrations serve as a replacement—in some instances—to long written descriptions of a scene in a film so that the reader is able to associate the argument presented with sourced visual imagery, even when such illustrations are directly exemplified though the particular film element being discussed, such as sound. In such instances, the illustration enables the reader to associate the theoretical arguments made about sound, to the visual image that they are paired against in order to confirm or contend with the suggested arguments. Illustrations serve a very active role in this thesis that deals with cognitivism, emotion and affect. They are not intended to distract the reader from the subject; indeed, they will only be introduced after certain theories have been introduced (in section one and part of section two), and their purpose, established. They are therefore intended to advance the reading experience through a deeper understanding of film concepts. They also demonstrate the importance of the thesis' focus on not only certain films but also specific scenes in the films and how they relate to the concepts and criticism discussed. In this regard, therefore, the illustrations emphasise the theories and concepts surrounding subjects in a way that written descriptions might not fully achieve. Additionally, while written theories can advance the reader's understanding of certain arguments, the illustrations are offered as practise-based (established) fact to help the reader in using their personal experience of film to connect the discourse with the abstraction that certain concepts discussed in the thesis might present.

Since the thesis specifically focuses on American films, any mention of films produced for cinemas outside the United States will be to serve as a backdrop for the discussion of

developments within American cinema, especially when exploring early usurpers in the independent filmmaking space. While no deep analysis into such films will be provided in this thesis, the mention of such films will prove useful when discussing cinematic techniques and film qualities that have existed outside of—and then been adopted in—American filmmaking practices. In other words, American productions have been consistently enriched by aesthetics emanating from other parts of the world. Hence, while the focus of this thesis is on American cinema, inclusions of films made outside this system will be included in the discussion, especially if there is a clear value in a way that enhances the discussion on American filmmaking practices. If the thesis is correct in suggesting that a theorisation of emotion and affect is not only possible but effective within independent cinema, then by extension, a means through which a differentiation might be drawn between independent and Hollywood cinemas in contemporary discourse will have been achieved. To this end, in each of the succeeding sections of the thesis—and in addition to new case study films—efforts have made to select films that are critically acclaimed in order to show that the possibility already exists for a practice-based cinema identity, if only through prevailing scholarly discourse of such films.

3.3. Chapters

The thesis is divided into three sections which are sub-divided across nine chapters. The first section includes Chapters 1, 2 and 3. So far, the thesis has followed discussions on key literature of concepts within film studies specially on cognitive film theory independent cinema, Hollywood cinema and philosophy. Chapter 2 has explored the complex dynamic relations between independent and mainstream American cinema and then extended such complexities toward the notions of emotion and affect while explaining how and why such concepts can be valued and theorised within the context of film as a means of understanding how both cinemas can be differentiated. The chapter has also explained how the term 'independent' has acquired different meanings at different points in the history in conjunction with Hollywood cinema, evolving according to the impact of changing conditions in the American film industry. The thesis will continue to explore these various meanings and how the concept of cognitive theory and philosophy can be understood through such meanings.

The second section explores film aesthetics, representation, and ideology in independent cinema. The section encompasses Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 offers important arguments on the industrial and economic history of both the independent and Hollywood sectors and the factors that led to the emergence of the 'independent label'. It then explores the aesthetic and emotional qualities of independent films through film form and presents the study of key

individual films including as *Clerks* (1994, Kevin Smith), *Tape* (2001, Richard Linklater), *Return of the Secaucus 7* (1979, John Sayles), *Broken Flowers* (2005, Jim Jarmusch) and *Midsommar* (2019, Ari Aster). Chapter 5 discusses representation in independent films, both through an identity-based cinematic representation—through aesthetic qualities within film—and socio-political representations within the cinema. The films explored in this chapter include *Go Fish* (1994, Rose Troche) and *Poison* (1991, Todd Haynes). Both chapters within this section also highlight ideology through the theoretical concepts of formalism, realism and illusionism, as it relates to film. It is argued in this thesis that ideology is a generator of emotive responses because an ideology highlights the range of emotions that can be offered by a subject. (For example, a depressive state, a feeling of sadness or a sensation of indifference can be offered through philosophical and psychological concepts such as nihilism and ironic detachments when considered within the context of film). Both chapter 4 and 5 thus uses cognitive and philosophical element as frameworks for understanding film texts. The purpose of section two is to show how American independent cinema has developed alongside Hollywood cinema with aesthetic, interpretive/ideological and industrial-economic changes in Hollywood shaping and informing independent cinema.

Section Three considers case studies which focus on specific films and/or filmmakers in order to provide a pathway towards the theorisation of emotion and affect in independent cinema. The section comprises of Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, and will utilise the aesthetic, representative and philosophical principles highlighted in Section Two to show how various ideas surrounding emotion function in both independent and Hollywood films. Hence, the above three chapters will consider concepts through which constructions of emotions are made available in film by way of their emotional engagement, emotional sustainability and sentimentalism with the audience. Such concepts will be considered through selected independent and Hollywood films from specific film directors.

Having expanded on cinematic discourse up to this point (and hopefully created an effective pathway towards the theorisation of emotion and affect within the independent system), the thesis' concluding chapter focuses on the research outcomes already proposed. It will summarise the key issues within several subjects proposed in the literature review as well as key concepts discussed throughout the thesis. It will then highlight the ways in which the thesis has expanded the understanding—and broadened the representation—of cinematic discourse. Additionally, it will propose approaches and methods through which independent films can be valued in contemporary discourse. The thesis will restate the importance of proffering a range of both independent and mainstream films in order to achieve such insights in cinematic discourse and the ways in which such propositions can be extended to broader

contexts, such as through analysing the relationship between the emotion system and political sensibilities and its implication for film interpretation. The thesis ends by proposing a foundation for further research relating to other areas of film and cognition that exceed the boundaries of discourse within this thesis.

3.4. Significance of the Research

The thesis aims to broaden the understanding of independent film as well as cinema within the American context as a whole. An investigation of emotion and cognitivism within the independent sector of filmmaking practices in American could lead to findings that, in the first instance, expand the understanding of the relationship between cognitive processes and different systems of film production. Secondly, it could also broaden the reader's understanding on the usefulness of different forms of emotion in analysing film texts.

The thesis also aims to influence current definitions of widely used concepts such as affect, emotion and sentimentalism and emotion and how they are utilised in film criticism. The thesis' approach could also create a more consistent and effective model for the differentiation of practices within American film productions through a practice-based identity. Finally, through an informed alternative approach to cinema identification, the thesis seeks a re-evaluation of the way we interpret and understand texts using broader ideological and philosophical concepts.

Section Two|

Film Theory: Aesthetics, Ideology and Representation

CHAPTER FOUR: THE INDEPENDENT FILM CULTURE|

This thesis will now turn to the way theory has informed—and continues to influence—one of the prominent areas of film studies research since the 1980s. Perceptibly, and through the discussions outlined in Chapter 2.1, serious study of independent cinema has been stimulated by three trends: 1) the aesthetic 2) the interpretive and 3) the industrial-economic. The aesthetic approach to independent films was initiated by auteurism in which film directors produced films through approaches that were counter to mainstream filmmaking practices by creating a distinctive visual style and theme (and therefore value) within film. Yannis Tzioumakis, in *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* (2006) and *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond* (2013), describes such films as 'quality' independent films which are noted as marking the early contemporary years of independent filmmaking; characterised as such for their low-budget, non-glossy, socio-politically conscious aesthetic.

The interpretive trend as David Bordwell argues, relies on "the social institution of academic film studies" that plays an important role in "establishing and monitoring interpretive activities" (Bordwell, 1993: 93). Film interpretation, he suggests, is also made possible when "linguistic constructs" account for "psychological, social and historical conditions" (ibid.). The industrial-economic trend in independent cinema encompasses the film's financial source as well as its marketing approach, both of which raise questions about how they are accomplished, whether within or outside of the influence of the studio system. These trends will be discussed in this section of the thesis. It will also analyse and philosophise independent film aesthetics in selected films to demonstrate how culture thrives in indie filmmaking through its emotional appeal. It will then expand on this notion by textually analysing specific indie films.

As discussed in Chapter 2.1, independent cinema since the 1980s has produced films with alternative viewpoints that are emotionally and intellectually engaging. Over the years, the cinema has also provided alternatives to conventional narratives, whether expressed through experimental approaches (*Wisconsin Death Trip*; 2000, James Marsh) or through crowd-pleasing comedy films (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*; 2002, Joel Zwick). The latter film, although having similarities with Hollywood productions (in terms of genre, *glossy* aesthetics, and marketing approach), did adopt many elements that deviated from the big Hollywood blockbuster conventions of the time. For instance, the film's approach to cultural representation through its portrayal of the Greek American culture offered a fresh and distinctive insight into the family dynamics, values, and traditions of Greeks. The provision of such a distinctive cultural experience was not typically depicted in mainstream cinema.

The alternative principles in independent cinema, as previously mentioned—and echoed by David Bordwell and Janet Staiger— emerged from the "historical hegemony of Hollywood" (Bordwell and Staiger, 2019: 621), that not only saw a need for an alternative style of filmmaking, but also a need to "study film styles and modes of production that differ from Hollywood's" (ibid.). They emphasise though, that discussions surrounding such studies should not be based on the positive or negative implications or connotations through a differentiation from the classical, because "one cannot simply oppose narrative or pleasure", and it is similarly important to "show how films can construct systematic alternatives" (ibid.).

Laura Marks' *The Skin of the Film*, discussed in Chapter 2.3 seems to be an applicable example of this methodology. In her exploration of both experimental and traditional cinemas—in which she coins the term "haptic visuality"—Marks implies that a hierarchy can be placed on cinema, hence, "cultural" cinema can be valued above "Western" cinema as the knowledge and memory pathway in the former is embodied, whereas the latter is supplemental (Marks, 2000: xiii). She therefore takes both approaches aforementioned by Bordwell et al (1988; 2019), in that while there is an attempt to draw on the affective nature of knowledge in both cinemas, she proposes cognitive-based negative implications for one cinema by identifying how filmic construction within both film practices are materialised, visualised, and internalised. It is argued in this thesis though, that there is nuance on such explorations on systemic differences. An identification of cognitive processes does not in and of itself, imply that whatever cognitive processes are utilised within certain systems means that changes out to be proposed due to such identifications or that it is of lesser value for having adopted such processes. Rather, it is simply highlighting that the formal devices employed in film will ultimately determine how cognition functions within such a film and will thus create a certain value of the film. In this thesis, such identifications are not intended to impose negative connotations to films of a certain system whose interpretative approach is due to, as Marks indicates, its supplemental constructions.

Systemic, contextual, and conceptual alternatives have also been exemplified in the discussions surrounding a *counter-cinema* by scholars in the decade following the end of the classical Hollywood era. Scholars such as Noël Burch and Jorge Dana in *Afterimage* (1974) and Colin MacCabe in *Screen* (1976) have all contributed towards demonstrating the different approaches utilised in alternative cinemas. MacCabe highlights how an engagement with artistic representations (such as illusionism), using formal aesthetic devices, can describe cinematic systems. Andre Bazin too, posits that within the principles of cinematic practices:

> […] [and] at the service or at the disservice of realism, [cinematic conventions] may increase or neutralise the efficacy of the elements of reality captured by the camera […] One can class, if not hierarchise, the cinematographic styles as a function of the gain of

reality that they represent. We shall thus call realist any system of expression, any narrative procedure which tends to make more reality appear on the screen. (Bazin quoted in MacCabe, 1976: 9)

Much like the arguments posed previously on Cognitive Film Theory in Chapter 2.3, Bazin is referring to a cinematic quality here; one which features emotional engagement between the object (text) and the subject of the engagement (the audience), through *unmanipulated* film form. (This thesis argues in advance that all film form is manipulated, but the extent to which it is described as otherwise, shall be owning to the extent of such manipulations, a necessity to manipulate the utilisation of said film form, as well as the emotive and affective qualities produced as a result of such manipulations. This will be examined more broadly in Chapter 5, specifically on the subject of illusion and realism). This quality of engagement as Bazin notes, must be absolute in its meaning and in the manner in which it is understood.

Still on counter-cinema, theorists Burch and Dana, particularly in their examination of aesthetics and ideology in relation to cinema, propose a classification for films based on their relationship between ideology and form. Crucially, they focus on analysing established systems and codes that function within narrative film history. The European films that they cite, such as Danish film *Gertrud* (1962, Carl Theodor Dreyer) then serve as basis for the proposition that traditional cinema adopts systems and codes from literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in order to "guarantee [the] linearity and illusionist effect" adopted in cinema (Burch and Dana, 1974: 43). Furthermore, the descriptors of such film practices would subsequently defamiliarise filmic language through the posed effects. In so doing:

> [F]ilms which are informed by a constant designation [or] deconstruction of the codes which, however ideologically determined at the strictly diegetic level, implicitly question this determination by the way they situate the codes and play upon them". (Burch and Dana, 1974: 48)

Although the allusions here are specifically in relation to European cinema, the suggestion of an *otherness* of systemic practices in Burch and Dana's approach implies an application of such conceptions to any cinema outside of the mainstream and therefore offers some value in the exploration of independent cinema aesthetics. This section of the thesis will continue to explore independent cinema in these terms, and its appropriation—and indeed subversion—of commonly employed cinematic codes.

4.1. Echoes of Independence: Early Pioneers

It is restated here that American independent filmmaking did not begin in the 1980s, even though this thesis identifies this period as the set-out of a clear-cut, identity-based industry practice that represented a coherent cinema system in which independent filmmaking began to

thrive in the United States. As explained in Chapter 2.1.3, the start of the 1980s was a significant decade in which developmental and transformational changes—both economically and aesthetically—meant that independent cinema started to become a semi-coherent label with a brand of filmmaking that was largely absent from Hollywood's filmmaking practices. These developments emerged due to the capitulation to a blockbuster mentality by Hollywood in the 1970s, alongside critical successes achieved through European art films. As reiterated by several scholars, including Jim Hillier (2001), Richard Ferncase (1996), Sherry Ortner (2013) and Yannis Tzioumakis (2012), the 1980s thus provided a unique opportunity for the independent world as a legitimate alternative to Hollywood.

Nonetheless, indie filmmaking practices and processes notably span back to the 19th century. Ferncase posits that "as long as the powers that be, have exerted control over the machinery of filmmaking and the distribution of movies, there have been outsiders scheming and clamouring to gain access" (Ferncase, 1996: 1). Hence, figures such as The Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis manufactured their own filming equipment—which they called the Cinematograph—following Thomas Edison's refusal to share in his invention of the motion picture camera. Their first film—one which would become a collection of many films which they called *Actualities*—was publicly projected in Paris in 1895 (Ferncase, 1996). Their films were well received in Paris as they instilled a certain emotional quality through their portrayal of real-life events in the city (ibid.).

By the early years of the 20th century, other players were interested in projecting their own films (much like Edison, the Lumière Brothers also guarded their design and refused to sell their new technology to filmmaker and illusionist, Georges Méliès. Méliès, determined to release his own films, travelled to London in 1895 to study and purchase the Animatograph from English experimental filmmaker, Robert W. Paul, along with several films in Paul's possession [Rosen, 1987: 750]). The filmmaker eventually altered the Animatograph, transformed the design into a film camera, and went on to release an adventure short film, *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902 (ibid.). Ferncase posits that "although Méliès' pictures adhered slavishly to theatrical conventions, they were the first to demonstrate the cinema's power for storytelling" (Ferncase, 1996: 2). The specific actions by individual figures acting independently—through their creativity and innovation—brought about a transformation in filmmaking practices of their time. To be clear, highlighting the approaches taken by filmmakers such as The Lumière Brothers and Méliès is to showcase their quest for independence and how they were able to influence filmmaking practices, particularly through technological innovation. It is not to suggest a similarity or a continuation of the independent movement in the US context.

In America, several experimental/independent filmmakers emerged decades after the above events, notably John Cassavates (often regarded as the *father* of American independent filmmaking), Russ Meyer as well as Stan Brakhage, in the 1950s; and George Romero, Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Dennis Hopper in the 1960s. These progenitors, and many more, were crucial to the development of filmmaking practices that would eventually become to known as American independent cinema. Following the success of Cassavetes' 1959 film, *Shadows* (the film was nominated for three awards within a year of its release) there emerged a newfound appreciation for a counter-cinema. Through his movie *Shadows* (a "$40,000 experimental feature" [Ferncase, 1996: 6]), Cassavetes is recognised as influencing other filmmakers such as Adolfas Mekas and Martin Scorsese (Hillier, 2001). Mekas is noted as saying that *Shadows* "doesn't betray life or cinema, whereas Hollywood Films […] reach us beautiful and dead" (Hillier, 2001: xi). Stuart Husband further notes that Cassavetes' film not only:

> […] paved the way for subsequent generations of indie filmmakers […] but it also heralded Cassavetes's unique oeuvre: slices of hand-held, improvisatory verité, from 1968's *Faces* to 1986's *Big Trouble*, which tackled subjects from marital strife to alcoholism to looming mortality in grainy, talky, raw-edged style. (Husband, 2019: para. 5.)

These manoeuvres and motivations by several film creatives—from those who were propelled towards technological advancements in order to produce devices for the projection of motion picture, to those who pushed filmmaking boundaries through form and content—serves to reflect and highlight how filmmakers have been usurping the established systems in order to make films that are independent of and from common practices, and that showcase their creative vision, style and concepts.

4.1.1. The Hollywood Trend and the Emergence of the Independent Label

There is certainly a perception among many of the critics mentioned so far, particularly in Chapter 2.1, and even within newer scholarship—such as Anna Roger's *American Independent Cinema: Rites of Passage and the Crisis Image* (2015), and Jennifer O'Meara's *Engaging Dialogue: Cinematic Verbalism in American Independent Cinema* (2018)—that independent cinema's identity is primarily anti-Hollywood, notably through independent productions in the 1980s that sought to exclude the high-budget, glossy, and star-focused elements from its filmmaking practices. Indeed, the perception extends to film audiences too, with observations made about how the gritty, quirky and off-beat (unconventional) aesthetics of indie films are *meaningful* and *realistic* rather than the *spectacular* and *fantastical* elements that are so often

associated with its Hollywood counterpart. However, it is argued in this thesis that independent cinema is rather anti-classical style.

Indeed, the former critical descriptor of independent films suggests that the establishing force behind the independent movement was as a result of contention with industry, or even that the inspiration for such films was born from moral convictions or principles that were/are antithetical to the practices of the Hollywood system. It can be argued, however, that the increasingly coherent system through which indie films began to thrive in the 1980s was simply an accommodating means through which the alternative anti-classical aesthetics that such films embodied could thrive. In conversation surrounding his 1989 film, *Sex Lies and Videotape*, Steven Soderbergh maintains that independent films should not be viewed as an opposition to studio films as though "the independents were always great while the studio owners were always the bad guys" (Kaufman 2002: 21). It is important to note, therefore, that the independent film movement did not emerge with such objectives, but rather from artistic motivations and a need for creative freedom. These motivations are evident from the aforementioned historical trends of independence within film production. Moreover, the pattern of semi-independent productions in the 1980s and 1990s comprising of films which indirectly relied on financing from major studios, demonstrates that the 'counter' to Hollywood was not primarily rooted in monetary concerns. Arguably, if such concerns were to ever arise during film production, then the subsequent discussions would be on how/if such financial strategies would be at the detriment of the creative vision for the film.

David E. James offers an important perspective on the relationship between systems of film production. He insists that there are connections to be made among various kinds of films—from the mainstream to the subcultural—with relations changing over time due to historical factors (James, 1989). However, he explains that alternative and Hollywood cinemas are not opposites, rather, both systems are interlinked and interdependent on each other, owning to the interconnectedness of aesthetics and politics, as well as dominant ideologies and industries. Of course, there will always be elements of defiance within independent cinema to perpetuate its autonomy from Hollywood as a whole. Soderbergh acknowledges this much, stating that "many American independent films are depressing at the end in order to prove that they are not commercial" (Soderbergh quoted in Kaufman 2002: 21). However, even such criticisms rooted in a need to express defiance is rather simplistic and ignores the form, style, techniques, and ideology that is adopted and/or elicited within any indie film—in its entirety— to justify such a *depressing* end. The film techniques adopted by independent filmmakers, as this section of the thesis will show, can only be described as anti-Hollywood because it is *de facto* anti-classical style. As examined in Chapter 2.1, the need for a socially conscious cinema

was a major factor that gave rise to the independent movement, a practice which was arguably lacking in Hollywood productions. Hence, Hollywood's history of hegemony effectively created a need to "study film styles and modes of production that differ from Hollywood" (Thompson, 2019: 379). Crucially, as Thompson notes, "a great deal more needs to be done in order to specify the salient differences involved" between the idea of a counter-cinema and Hollywood (ibid.). To understand the discourse surrounding the emergence of oppositional practices that are instigated by a need for social and emotional relevancy within film representation, it is crucial to revisit Hollywood's stylistic approaches briefly.

The hallmarks of Hollywood cinema were firmly established by the end of the classical era in 1960 wherein "the classical style played a major […] role in the American film industry and its mode of production" (Thompson, 2019: 367). Such characteristics are arguably encompassed in four systemic qualities. Firstly of narrative logic, which "functions as part of the provision of pleasure in cinema entertainment, not as the point of it" (Maltby, 2003: 453); but also primarily motivated compositionally, because classical narration "works to construct the story in specific ways" (Bordwell, 2019: 24) by producing "a chain of cause and effect [that] demands that we see a close-up of an important object or that we follow a character into a room" (Bordwell, 2019: 25).

Second on the list of systemic qualities of the cinema is of performance logic, a rather complex concept in cinema as there are several factors to consider in what constitutes a film's performance. In *The Spoken Seen: Film and the Romantic Imagination* for example, Frank McConnell argues that film performance is "a warframe between personality and mechanism" (McConnell, 1975: 182). As he explains it, the way the audience interprets a film or film sequence is based on "a crucial, archetypal aspect of all film personality [that is], that struggle of the human to show itself within the mechanical" (McConnell, 1975: 177). Paradoxically, the performer "is burdened with the necessity of realising his role […] through a medium which resists the full reality of that presence" (ibid.). This clash is further amplified by the consideration of acting as analogical, meaning that its compositions is reliant on "proportion, gradation and inflection rather than the clear-cut distinctions […] of digital sign systems" (Maltby, 2003: 370). Indeed, performance is heavily nuanced and contextual, relying on the object of the emotion. Maltby adds that performance in Hollywood films also rely on certain constructions outside of the filmic space that produce the performance on screen. Hence, "several bodies may be used to construct a single performance: voices are dubbed, stunt artists are used for dangerous action sequences, and […] hand models or body doubles provide body parts to substitute for the actors" (ibid.). This idea of systemic constructions of stylistic elements, particularly with regards to audience interpretation, introduces questions relating to

realism and illusionist theories within systems of film production, which will be considered in Chapter 5.

The third and fourth systemic qualities—cinematic time as well as cinematic space—serve as secondary systems to the other two qualities already cited. Importantly, while both of these systemic qualities cannot function without the context of the two preceding systems within the Hollywood classical style, they do serve as driving tools for the narrative and performance qualities within specific governing principles. Echoing this point, Bordwell suggests that "space and time are almost invariably made vehicles for narrative causality" (Bordwell, 2019: 7). He further proposes that:

> […] if we do find a passage of discontinuous cutting, we can ask whether it is still serving a narrative function (e.g., to convey a sudden, shocking event). In such a case, the relation among systems would remain consistent even if the individual device or system varied from normal usage. (Bordwell, 2019: 7)

Hence, even *irregularities* among such principles, can be seen as intentional and serving a specific purpose.

The stylistic approaches of Hollywood films, embodied in the four systemic qualities highlighted above, make up the classical style. They are generally understood to conform to specific "rules of compositions and aesthetic organisations that produce unity, balance and order in the resulting artwork" (Maltby, 2003: 15). However, such clinical approaches with regards to rules and codes within the classical style means that there is, arguably, limited room for innovation and originality in film. Using the general idea on the conventions of Hollywood style highlighted above, the remaining parts of this chapter will explore how such conventions are adopted—through their application and reimagining—in independent filmmaking practices.

Following the establishment of the classical style of filmmaking, the Hollywood industry became a dominant force within as well as outside of the United States. Several scholars have written extensively on the early trends of hegemony in Hollywood cinema and its effect on the global market. David Cook for example, gives an account of how the cinema in the 1970s functioned—and transformed—during a decade of social unrest, particularly through developments surrounding auteurism and industry. Cook explains that the integration of both "an aesthetically experimental, socially conscious *cinema d'auteur*" with "a burgeoning and rapacious blockbuster mentality" proved to be a cinematic phenomenon in the 1970s (Cook: xvii). Filmmaking trends explored in Chapter 2.2 of this thesis, such as the emergence of blaxploitation films during the New Hollywood Era (in Chapter 2.2.2), was an example of such cinematic endeavours. William Paul comments on this shift in practices during this period by highlighting that:

> Old Hollywood relied on a varied but conventional product to attract its mass audience. New Hollywood looks to lists of *bankable* stars, trendspotting, demographic studies - all of which adds up to a clear admission of failure, a loss of the intuitive certainty about its audience that old Hollywood had: what brought the audience into a theatre, what it wanted when it got there, what would surprise it. (Paul, 1977: 41)

He explains that the late 1970s saw Hollywood's continued focus on films with commercial appeal through films based on bestsellers, hit plays and films stars (a marketing strategy that was crucial to commercial success as the film stars generated their own publicity).

Cook notes that the reason for Hollywood's marketing approach at the time was due to the idea that a co-existence between both developments—between a film d'auteur and a cinema commercial—would be a feasible, permanent strategy for the market. He describes this assumption as an "illusion", for two reasons. Firstly, it relied on commercial success based on the assumption of a specific political trend of a liberal referendum on anti-war sentiments (which was soon dispelled by the election of a Republican president in 1980). On a second note, it relied on the premise that one of such strategies would trend upwards in trajectory, and with a similar momentum of the other; an assumption also invalidated with the overwhelming rise of films such as *Jaws* (1977, Steven Spielberg) and *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas) (Cook, 2000: xvi). The success of both films consequently saw "a privileging [of] juvenile mythos of 'awe' and 'wonder' in movies that embraced conservative cultural values" over socio-political principles, in conjunction with "a superstructure of high-tech special effects and nostalgia for classical genres" (Cook, 2000: xvi). Furthermore, films that adopted this format by the early 1980s with such productions as *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980, Irvin Kershner), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, Steven Spielberg) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983, Richard Marquand) saw huge levels of success, grossing higher than all the highest-earning films between 1970 and 1979 (Cook, 2000). Hence, the films with artistic concepts became less of a priority, because as an industry, "Hollywood functions according to a commercial aesthetic, one that is essentially opportunistic in its economic motivation" (Maltby 2003: 15). With independent productions however, the commercial criteria eliminated such a burden. The film movement aimed to legitimise creative vision through diversity—both of social issues and of filmmakers—and divergence. Even its power and influence through these objectives would come later—and emerge slowly, and not due to economic motivations but through such *salvage* objectives.

By the 1980s, Tino Balio suggests that Hollywood sought to maintain a dominant position in entertainment and "entered the age of globalisation [which] dictated that the top players in the business develop long-term strategies to build on a strong base of operations at home while achieving a major presence in all of the world's important markets" (Balio, 1998: 58). Such industry objectives then saw a trend in which the Hollywood's narrative and stylistic

codes influenced other film production formats. It was adopted in animation productions through "depth compositions, complex crane shots, and goal-oriented protagonist[s]" (Thompson, 2019: 379). It was also adopted in documentary filmmaking, hence, "industrial government films, educational shorts, and training films, although often non-narrative in structure, call upon the devices and systems of Hollywood filmmaking […] [by adopting] Hollywood techniques and production values" (ibid.). Thompson also identifies Hollywood's influence in television through camera work.

The result of this, as David James (although arguing earlier that all cinemas are always by some means interconnected) acknowledges, means that "any alternative practice, whether it be Black film, underground film, or women's film, may be understood as a response to […] three […] spheres of activity: the alternative social group, the dominant society, and the hegemonic cinema" (James, 1989: 23). Films such as *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989) and *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) can be seen as providing such alternative viewpoints. The former film explores racial tensions and race relations in the context of the American society. The latter film explores themes of sexuality and identity, in addition to race. Both films are examples of alternative film practices challenging Hollywood narratives and expanding the boundaries of cinematic storytelling. James further notes that the main function of film form in the cinematic space, and under such practices, is to highlight and engage the "cinematic possibilities" of the events being portrayed (James, 1989: 23). Counter-cinema can thus be seen as a reactive force to the mainstream, be it by way of restoring/salvaging less-explored areas of culture and society or by questioning the normalised code of its practices through aesthetics.

Concurrently, the 1980s therefore saw a counter style to classical Hollywood with films that constructed systematic alternatives. Their form and style arguably generated a different emotional appeal. Geoff Gilmore argues that one of the factors that has helped Hollywood's industrial dominance through the course of America's film history has to do with "the media['s] embrace of new artists [which] is often a reaction to stagnation in the dominant world" (Gilmore, 1997: 12). However, the traction that independent filmmaking started to gain in the 1980s was generated by filmmakers "who ha[d] managed to create disturbing, bold and iconoclastic work, or simple work that [were] unusual and engaging" (ibid.). As Gilmore argues, the hallmark of independent cinema comes from "the quality of its creativity" and "artistic integrity", which as he explains is the foundation for its films that explore "all aspects of life and reality but reaches for the sublime" (Gilmore, 1997: 13). The thesis will now move to explore these qualities in selected independent films and how they are demonstrated through aesthetics, representation, and ideology.

4.2. Aesthetic and Emotional Range in Indie Films

> It is said that the camera
> cannot lie, but rarely do we allow it to do anything else, since the camera sees
> what you point it at: the camera sees what you want it to see. The language of
> the camera is the language of our dreams.
> James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work*

The above quote from James Baldwin suggests that the camera is a powerful, subjective tool because it primarily serves as a mirror to society and as a vehicle through which we project our own beliefs, values, perceptions, and prejudice onto the world. Baldwin seems to speak to the subjective nature of visual representation and the power of images as a way of shaping our understanding of reality. The quote reflects the sentiments in this chapter. As we begin to explore aesthetic expressions in independent cinema, it is important to think about how the how the filmmaker exercises control over visual representations of reality. It is also equally to think about how filmic elements (such as camera movement, camera angle, and framing) and formal devices are utilised by the filmmaker to help shape our emotional responses, understanding and interpretation of narrative.

Having explored the industrial-economic trends surrounding independent and Hollywood cinema, the thesis will now explore the aesthetic and interpretative trends of independent cinema through an initial exploration of emotion through aesthetics and formalism—in conjunction with how these elements function and might be valued and discussed—in indie films. Mark Gallagher notes in *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and Beyond* that the aesthetic and interpretive trends in cinema—within contemporary and historical contexts—deal with the "explicit textual correlations among screen works across history, expressed through narrative and thematic similarity […] visual style, editing and sound" (Gallagher, 2013: 84). The relationship also extends to "filmmakers' linkages to their own works […] as well as assertions […] from producers […] and from film critics" (Gallagher, 2013: 85). Additionally, the aesthetic and interpretative trends both "exist partly in tandem to the extent that aesthetic choices are articulated and contextualised through discourse" (ibid.). The latter cinema connection is buttressed by Bordwell (1993) at the start of this chapter and explains how both trends, through linguistic constructs, play a significant role in establishing contemporary, historical, psychological, and social conditions.

The language of objectivism is certainly unavoidable when considering aesthetics in any art form. As argued by Clive Bell in *Art* (1913) this is because "aesthetic theories" is centred around "aesthetic judgements" which is further dependent on "personal taste" (Bell, 1913: 10). Consequently, with discourse surrounding aesthetics in visual art, it is important to reconcile

this problem with some theoretical framing. In practical terms, Bell posits that it is possible that half of the members within an audience will be moved by certain elements of visual art, and the other half to be moved by other elements of art, albeit not completely dissimilar to the first group. The quality that then binds both groups' understanding and engagement of visual art is, in theory, "significant form" (Bell, 1913: 11). This is because when it comes to discussions about such emotional engagements with visual art, questions about the differences in aesthetic experiences can be examined based on the quality that is either present or absent within them. Such a process prompts a consideration of emotion within art, as well as the object of said emotion.

The language of objectivism with regards to aesthetics is therefore circumvented with such factors because there is no obligation "to pry behind the object into the state of mind of him who made it" (Bell, 1913: 11) in order that one find value and meaning in art. Hence, to consider aesthetics—and in an attempt to theorise emotion and affect in film as an art form— there must be an acknowledgement that "forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws do move us in a particular way. [Therefore,] […] it is the business of an artist […] to combine and arrange them that they shall move us" (ibid.). The interpretive code in art is thus rooted in *significant form* in the way that it creates a collective understanding of certain/all elements of a piece of art while also creating discourse around the differences in interpretation of other elements contained within such an art form. That is, there is a reasonable assumption of what X means within art form due to the way in which form has been utilised to showcase the circumstances surrounding X (so that it stimulates the observer, either cognitively or emotionally). Simultaneously, when form is utilised in a different capacity and with specific coding around the object of Y, there is an unspecified *objective* understanding of Y, because such a combination in coding has created a multiplier of objects in which Y can be understood in various ways. Hence, the object of the emotional response is split across various interpretations. Furthermore, even without a need to "pry behind the object" as Bell posits, in order to discover the meaning intended by the utilisation of form in the instance of Y, the result of a variation in interpretation causes the audience to nonetheless reflect on the *true meaning* intended in the art by the artist, even as they embrace their own interpretations and understanding of said art. In both instances though, it is the use of significant form that ultimately creates a pathway through which the observer engages with art.

The question of *the object* in relation to formal elements of the art form that is film, is important in this thesis. As the thesis continues to explore emotion in film through aesthetics and formalism, it should be noted that a distinction is made between emotion engendered within the film text through the bodies eliciting emotion (that is, the characters on screen); and

emotion elicited by the film text through an engagement with film form. (This is quite unlike the configurations of emotions discussed in Chapter 2.3 with regards to real-world and filmic emotions. That specific discussion dealt with the question of the validity of an emotional experience based on the subject/arbiter of the initial emotional embodiment. As stated in that chapter, the rejection of the condition of differentiating both emotion systems is done under the justification that the mechanisms for emotional response for both are reliant on cognitivism which are motivated by knowledge and interest in the object, and therefore makes such questions of initial emotional embodiment irrelevant when attempting to theorise emotion in film in this thesis. In this instance, the configuration is not one born from emotional validity, but of emotional engagement.) In order for an audience to engage emotionally with film, there must be an initial engagement—consciously or sub-consciously—with formal elements within the film, which can be experienced independently and outside of the influence of the bodies eliciting emotion within film. Consequently, the latter structure of emotion elicited by the film text through an engagement with film form takes priority in this thesis because it primarily attempts to qualify emotion through meaning, and meaning is bound by form.

The reader is reminded that in a cinematic context, form describes "the way films are put together [in order to] understand what they are attempting to tell us" (Kolker, 2012: 3). Film form, through formal components, is able to produce film aesthetics when, for instance, "a film's formal elements are consistent, and economically interwoven and the film in consequence is valued coherence or unity" (Kuhn and Westwell, 2020: 264). Such principles will be expounded upon in Chapter 4.4.1. With the distinction mentioned above in mind, filmic emotion then becomes tantamount to the notion of aesthetic emotion, although both structures of emotions are crucial to the emotional experience of the audience. That is, the embodied emotions of screen characters are just as important a component in creating meaning in film, as well as a major element in the audience's experience of affect through a relationship with form. Roger Fry reinforces this idea in *20th Century Theories of Art*, noting that "[a]esthetic emotion is an emotion about form" (Fry, 1990: 74). He explains that "purely formal relations of certain kinds, [...] [or] the recognition by them of particular kinds of formal relations, arouse [*peculiarly profound*] emotions" (ibid.). He further notes that, such aesthetic emotions could also be "accompanied by other emotions" by way of "instinctive life" (ibid.). This emphasises Bell's arguments about the quality of aesthetic experiences and how such capabilities are subject to aesthetic judgement.

Fry goes on to cite music as an example of a formal structure of emotional engagement and establishes the trend by suggesting that knowledge by intentional association leads to certain progressions in the way expectation is created. Consequently,

> [...] from the beginning, the idea of a formal design or scheme is impressed on our minds, and anything which depart[s] violently from that would be not merely meaningless, but an outrage to our sense of order and proportion. We have then an immediate recognition of formal design, or a trend in every part towards a single unity or complete thing which we call tune. (Fry, 1990: 76)

Discussions on the relationship between emotion and formal structures are also covered by Ed Tan who argues that the filmmaker shapes form in order provide emotion. In so doing, "the intensity, nature and dosage of each individual emotion over time and in relation to other emotions has been preprogramed by the filmmaker, even though such preprograming is not always based on conscious reflection" (Tan, 2013: 223). Such meticulous coding ensures that the viewer not only sustains interest in the narrative but responds in kind to filmic events as they unfold.

Several crucial points were noted in previous chapter regarding emotion and affect in film and in relation to the means in which they are embodied and experienced. In Chapter 2.3.1, the thesis highlighted Greg Smith's (2003) four theoretical approaches to understanding emotional experiences with film. It was suggested that the peripheral theories, which relies on "facial feedback", enables the audience interpret information provided by the face as a means of determining emotional experience. Hence, emotions are in the first instance, embodied by the character(s) on screen which determines, in part, and gauges the response of the viewer. The chapter also touched on Smith's central neurophysiological and cognitive appraisal theories which it was argued, are affective (rather than emotive) since they are informed by sources outside of the filmic bodies while also lacking intentionality towards the object of the emotion. That is, emotional experiences are also informed and sourced through structures (form) outside of an experiencing body (film characters).

On the subject of affect, Chapter 2.3.3 of the thesis argued that form and subject (rather than the element of an object) are required to provide meaning. Consequently, the sensation produced in the experiencing body of the subject, is affective in conditioning but emotive in manifestation. Perspective is crucial here: in the case of filmic emotion, the subject of the emotional response is the audience (a response which is in itself secondary as it is experienced in the first instance by one or more filmic bodies, as discussed in Chapter 2.3) while the object for such experiences are the film characters who themselves also embody emotions (that they themselves are subject to, but only through form). In the case of affect, the film characters are the object of said affects whereas the film elements and structures surrounding the text through form become the subject of affect. Hence as argued in this thesis, filmic affect is controlled in structure and within the film text initially, and the resulting affective experience (where the situation of affect is the audience), is informed by such affective connotations of the subject of the filmic affect, whereas filmic emotions is shared in part with the audience as the subject of

the emotion. The table below provides a summary on how the concepts of emotion and affect will be utilised in this thesis.

	Filmic Emotions	Filmic Affects
1	Film characters embody emotion	Film text embodies affect
2	Audience is the subject of emotion	Form is the subject of affect
3	The film character(s) is the object of emotion	The object of affect is less specific
4	Emotional experience is provided to the audience through an engagement with filmic bodies exemplifying emotion	Affective experience is provided to the audience through an engagement with film form

Table 4.1 – Filmic Emotions Vs. Filmic Affects: Key differences in the situation and manifestation of emotion and affect in film

In Chapter 3, the thesis noted that although affect can be found situated in several bodies that constitutes the film, it will seek to prioritise the text—through film form—as the body of affect manifestation. Hence, the audience becomes *subjected* to such filmic affects. This approach will thus create a legitimate pathway through which both emotion and affect can be theorised within film because the subject of affect specifically, will be theorised textually and such textual affects embody form and subject. Moreover, a focus on the audience as the object/body of affect encroaches on reception studies and away from the film text itself. With such conditions established, the thesis now moves to explore aesthetic emotion in indie films through *Clerks* (1994, Kevin Smith) and *Tape* (2001, Richard Linklater).

4.2.1. The Quality Independent Film

'Quality' as a descriptor has been used by several scholars to characterise contemporary independent films. Jeffrey Sconce highlights the philosophical qualities of such films where the use of the "illusion of authorial/narrational effacement" implies or commands a certain "complex formal challenge of rendering the uncomfortable and unspeakable with such acute blandness, giving [such] films a matter-of-fact quality that no doubt leads to their common indictment as nihilistic (Sconce, 2002: 361). In discourse surrounding independent films and filmmaking practices, the quality descriptor has also been used synonymously with films embodying *quirky sensibilities*. James MacDowell notes that such films provide "a type of self-consciousness in visual style which hints at a sense of surreal artificiality, [and more importantly], a tone that is often concerned to create tensions between ironic distance from a sincere engagement with protagonists" (MacDowell, 2013: 54). On the latter conception, MacDowell explains that one way this is achieved is "for films to view characters' schemes and achievements as comically absurd or potentially bound for failure and—thus open to a

certain amount of ridicule—at the same time as they are treated with degrees of sympathy" (MacDowell, 2013: 55). Quality independent films have also been described in terms of "formal innovation" which seeks to "refresh or question and undermine genre conventions" (King, 2005: 165) and present alternative means by which the audience engages emotionally with a film.

The independent quality is arguably preserved through a provision of realism styles which departs from mainstream conventions. In his exploration on the unifying quality that bind all works of visual art, Bell also argues that:

> "[T]here must be […] one quality without which a work of art cannot exist; possessing which, in the least degree, no work is altogether worthless. What is this quality? What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions?" (Bell, 1913: 7–8)

The philosophical, quirky, and formal qualities mentioned above are exemplified in *Clerks* (1994, Kevin Smith) and *Tape* (2001, Richard Linklater). The thesis will now examine how both films through certain aesthetically moving forms are able to produce emotions and emotional engagement.

4.2.2. *Clerks* (1994)

> Why do I have this life? I'm stuck in this pit, working for less than slave wages, working on my day off. The goddamn steel shutters are closed. I deal with every backward-assed fuck on the planet. I smell like shoe polish. My ex-girlfriend is catatonic after fucking a dead guy, and my present girlfriend has sucked 36 dicks […] my life is in the shitter right now. (Dante, *Lamentation* Scene)

The above excerpt from Kevin Smith's *Clerks*, effectively sums up the events of the film in its entirety. *Clerks* tells the story of the day in the life of two store employees, Dante Hicks, a manager at a convenience store, and Randal Graves, a manager at the next-door video rental store. Dante complains to Randal about being stuck in his job and in his way of life although, as events in the film unfold, it becomes clear to the audience that Dante does not do much to change his life circumstances. Randal, however, seems satisfied with where he is in life as he makes clear to Dante in response to his grievance, "I'm satisfied with my situation for now, you don't hear me complaining".

The film structure in *Clerks* is presented in grim black and white shots, which seems to symbolise the emptiness as well as mundanity of the characters' lives. A prominent stylistic feature adopted in *Clerks* is the use of title texts which seems to herald a new character or plot point in the film. Arguably, Smith approaches the story as an author would a book, treating the story in chapters rather than adopting a classical narrative structure. The approach itself is a form of *formal innovation* as the title texts embellish the actions that succeed them. This is

because each plot point is backed by minor events that do little to nothing to advance the story in a way that drastically leads to character development (a complete departure from the use of plot points in conventional cinema where major events within the film serve to change the course of the story in a way that aids character development). Smith's stylistic approach here thence mimics Dante's life as nothing in his daily life makes any meaningful impact so that it serves as a catalyst for life changes through new actions.

Figure 4.1.1 – The second title text in *Clerks*   Figure 4.1.2 – Opening scene after *Vilification* title text

Title texts such as 'Vilification', 'Harbinger', 'Paradigm', 'Whimsy' and 'Catharsis' are used as captions for unfolding events and seemingly serve the function of hinting at plot development and providing a framework into how each scene in the film might be interpreted. Since these titles could be theme-based, tone-based or just a descriptor of/for the natural progression of the film—such as 'Denouement' (which roughly translates as the final part/resolution of a film/narrative)—the audience is invited to engage emotionally through the initial cognitive implementation of finding meaning/making sense of each title as it relates to the plot point and/or character. The bold text 'Vilification' immediately triggers a cognitive response of interest followed by an emotional response of association: what does this mean? Who is being vilified? Who is doing the vilifying? These questions born from the use of title texts gets the audience thinking, ascertaining, and engaging with dialogue and characters to fulfil these interests and questions, even before they are able to decern who/what the subject of the text is associated with.

There are several key elements in *Clerks* that provide emotional range. Dead-pan humour is a tool used effectively throughout the film. The humour in *Clerks* transcends the characters and dialogue. Smith also utilises humour through textual cues exteriorised within the *movie/action space* as visualised in the various signboards and banners in Dante's store. (The thesis uses 'movie space' as an inspired term from Richard Maltby's *Hollywood Cinema* [2003] in which he discusses *Time* in cinema. He suggests that 'movie time' is the length of the time of the event contained in the film [for example the events in *Forrest Gump* spans 30 years and covers the period from the 1950s to the early 1980s] and 'film time' is the actual duration of

the film as provided to the audience [and this would be '2h 22m' in *Forrest Gump*]. Hence, 'space' as a replacement here connotes the events and environment that the characters on screen are a part of—elements that exist within their world—much like diegetic sound/music. Similarly, the thesis also uses 'action space' interchangeably with movie space, a term borrowed from Haig Khatchadourian [1987] in his discussion on *Space and Time in Film* to mean "the three-dimensional visual space created by the images" in which action occurs and exists on the "two-dimensional visual space occupied by the surface of the screen" [Khatchadourian, 1987: 170]). One of such textual cues in the action space is visualised through the banner located in front of the store which reads: "I assure you, we're open". Signboards in front of the counter such as, "If you plan to shoplift, let us know, thanks" and "Please leave money on the counter. Take change when applicable. Be honest" can also be seen as customers interact with Dante at the store counter. These textual cues serve as mood cues to elicit humour in the audience in a way that ultimately reveals the passivity with which Dante approaches his livelihood.

Figure 4.1.3 – Textual cue in store front   Figure 4.1.4 – Textual cue in store counter

The interest with which the audience approaches the characters through emotional engagement in *Clerks* is generated through film dialogue. When asked by his curious girlfriend Veronica ('Ronni') about how he knows that his customers are taking the right change or even paying for what they take, Dante replies: "Theoretically, people see money on the counter, no one is around, they think they're being watched", to which Veronica responds: "Honesty through paranoia!" This further portrays Dante as a passive character, but one who is able to think about the world around him through his own interactions with people on a daily basis.

Figure 4.1.5 – Dante and Ronni in conversation

In 'Perspicacity', Randal needs Dante's car to go to the video store, Big Choice, to rent movies. Dante wonders why Randal needs to go that far for a movie when he works at a video store himself. He also reminds Randal that as a store employer, he just could not do as he pleases while working. A customer continuously interrupts their conversation and Randal spits water in his face. His justification for this, as he points out to Dante, was to prove a point:

> Title does not dictate behaviour. If title dictated my behaviour as a clerk serving the public,
> I wouldn't be allowed to spit water at that guy, but I did. My point is that people dictate
> their own behaviour. Even though I work in a video store, I choose to rent movies at Big
> Choice.

The character of Randal thereby serves as a push-back to the monotony of everyday life, albeit it is also implied that his efforts are of no significant value to himself and those around him. The philosophical lens through which Dante and Randall view life is present in dialogue throughout the film. It serves to reveal—and indeed justify—the way in which both characters exist in the world and therefore how they interact with the people around them.

Figure 4.1.6 – Dante and Randal in conversation

The camera work in *Clerks*, despite the many titles assigned to nearly every scene—which might suggest a fast-paced film—adopts a slow-burn technique to the contrary. This ranges from dialogue to acting. Dialogue seems to be the key element in the film through which all other techniques and stylistic approaches are formed/considered. The characters are mostly inactive (that is, not only are they not involved in actions of any real significance that drives the events in the film in any progressive way, but there is also little movement within the movie space, and most of the events in the film takes place in the store). Hence, in other to engage

emotionally with the story and the characters, the audience must first engage with dialogue because it is through dialogue that the characters are understood.

The characters themselves reveal truths about themselves: they tell us who they are. This is achieved through a setup akin to an interview format where the characters engage in a question-and-answer dialogue for most of the film. For example, in the 'Syntax' sequence, Dante and Randal have a lengthy discussion about *Star Wars*: *Return of the Jedi* and in 'Whimsy', Randal and Dante's ex-girlfriend Caitlin have a conversation about her relationship with Dante. These scenes present dialogues where questions are raised by one character and answered by the other. The camera work thus adopted in the film for the purpose of aligning with this mode of dialogue is the use of a tripod-mounted, single-camera setup. With the use of these mise-en-scène elements, the audience is thence assigned a position behind the camera within the action space, as if recording and listening to a conversation between two people. It invites the audience to *come closer* and be a part of the conversation, with an implication that they must listen *closely* to understand the character's perspective.

In the 'Harbinger' sequence, Dante and Randal decide to go for Julie Doyle's wake who is an old friend from high school. While the characters are conversing in the moving car, Kevin Smith utilises hand-held shooting with fast panning shots, moving from character to character—a drastic change from the mounted camera shots that is used for most of the film. The quirky fast pan shots also lay emphasis on the use of one camera in filming. The audience is once again, placed as the *man behind the camera*, so to speak, thereby putting them in close proximity with the characters in the movie space. However, this approach achieves a different result in this sequence. In 'Syntax' and 'Whimsy', the audience is invited to partake in the conversation within close range of the characters. This is due to the composition adopted such as the use of medium shots that allows for the dialogue to take the lead over style. In 'Harbinger' however, although the audience is equally invited into the action space with the fast pan shots, such a composition not only interferes with dialogue but overtakes it as the audience's expectation of its use is contrary to conventional wisdom.

The frenetic shots, in mainstream usage, would usually correspond with the active visual style and story. For example, panic and intensity are represented in Steven Spielberg's 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan* through the use of handheld camera work to capture the chaos of war. Therefore, while intimacy with characters is achieved in 'Harbinger' (not only with the use of the hand-held shot but also with the spatial arrangement of the characters in the car), the energy/intensity that such shots command through the story is missing because the characters are primarily conversing in an enclosed space. The composition adopted here therefore serves a different purpose of putting style over dialogue in the sequence. The audience's role thus

shifts from active to passive viewer—from interviewer to cameraman—for the first time in the film despite the point of view shots that simultaneously creates intimacy with the characters on screen.

'Purgation', much like 'Syntax', is another instance in which dialogue shapes the film's stylistic approach. Randal urges Dante to vent his frustrations: "Tell me there aren't customers that annoy the piss out of you on a daily basis". With hesitation, Dante goes on to describe some of the problems he experiences with some customers on a daily basis. This is presented in cut-away videos which gives a visual representation of his frustration with his customers. The cut-aways are no different in visual style than that of the established composition, except with the use of close-up shots of each customer. In the case of one customer in particular, a close-up shot is used when she asks Dante a question after which the camera zooms out to reveal a huge banner behind her with the answer to her question. This is done to highlight Dante's silent frustration at the inattentiveness of his customers. Randal too, gives some examples of customers that annoy him at the video store and there is a reiteration in the cut-aways of the visual style adopted during his account of things.

Figure 4.1.7 – Dante's customer

Figure 4.1.8 – Randal's customer

In both instances, comic sound effects such as the *Climbing Fast/Running on Air* sound effects accompany the visuals and are used to indicate the absurdity of the questions being asked. Furthermore, the repetitiveness in visuals in both examples—both in the camera setup as well as the mise-en-scène (and even down to the use of the same customer in the same clothing in both cut-aways)—serves to highlight the quirkiness of the film which, as mentioned by MacDowell (in Chapter 4.2.1), produces a "self-consciousness in visual style" (2013: 54). It also reveals how similar both Dante and Randal are the problems they encounter daily as well as how they react to such similar issues.

The form in which the film is presented primarily works towards understanding and advancing the dialogue amongst the characters, and therefore the audience's engagement with them. Throughout the film it is suggested that Dante is not a risktaker but a pessimist: he faces a dilemma with regards to going back to school, he also struggles in his romantic relationship as well as backs down from confrontation so much so that he is present at work on his day off. In 'Lamentation', a frustrated Randal criticises Dante:

> Oh, you're comfortable, right? This is a life of convenience for you and any attempt to change it would shatter the pathetic microcosm you've fashioned for yourself […] it's the same thing with Veronica. You date Veronica because she's convenient and low maintenance, meanwhile all you ever do is talk about Caitlin.

The character of Randal on the other hand is impulsive, spontaneous and with seemingly no existential problems: he spends his work hours watching hermaphrodite porn and acting unprofessionally in the presence of customers. Dante responds to Randal's criticisms by saying: "It must be great to have this ability to simplify things the way you do". Both characters thus signify juxtaposing facets of life's monotony, although Dante's passivity and Randal's spontaneity ultimately lend themselves to a similar banal end.

Noteworthy are some of the other characters in *Clerks*. Jay as well as Silent Bob (played by Smith himself) are portrayed as stoners and can be seen loitering around the convenience store in several scenes. In 'Juxtaposition' however, they are portrayed as the voice of reason when Dante expresses his intention to leave Veronica in order to pursue a new relationship with his ex-girlfriend Caitlin. Silent Bob speaks for the first time in the film, to express disapproval of Dante's intentions. Jay reminds Dante that Veronica has done a lot for him and says: "What's a good plate with nothing on it?" The conversation exposes the complexities of human beings and human interactions: Jay and Silent Bob, although existing in the margins of society (and seemingly wasting their lives away), are both shown to be *a diamond in the rough*, if you will—characters of value through their worldly experience. *Clerks* therefore oscillates between Dante's conformism and Randal's subversion as well as the sense of ironic distance that Jay and Silent Bob provide. The audience is thereby invited to identify with each of the characters on such basis.

Another significant study of the characters in the film can be examined through the customers who seem to take pride in discussing their jobs when they are shopping in the convenience store. In 'Syntax', a contractor interrupts Dante and Randal's *Star Wars* conversation to tell them about his job. His unsolicited ramblings, though humorous, enables the audience understand Dante's plights about his customers. In another instance, a lady comes into the store and mocks another customer, a counsellor, wanting "the perfect dozen eggs". Before she exits the store, she says: "It's important to have a job that makes a difference, boys. That's why I manually masturbate caged animals for artificial insemination". The film's emphasis on livelihood serves to show the contributions each individual makes to society while also highlighting to the audience, the hypocrisy of the everyday working man.

It seems that the day in which *Clerks* is set is symbolic to both Dante and Randal's lives. Through dialogue, the sameness of the everyday is revealed, hence, the audience gets the sense that events unfold similarly, regardless of the chosen day. Their customers are also the same people (as seen in the cut-away videos). Their lives appear to be the same every day, even as far as events unfold, with no prospects or ambitions. This is emphasised by the "blandness" and "matter-of-fact quality"—that, as aforementioned in Chapter 4.2.1 by Sconce (2002: 361)—denotes bleakness and nihilism. Neither Dante nor Randal are role models, neither are they characters with any exemplary purpose (a character approach which is barely featured in mainstream filmmaking). Hence, the two main characters, especially Dante, are "open to a certain amount of ridicule" by the filmmaker, but also "treated with degrees of sympathy" (MacDowell, 2013: 55) in moments when it is clear that he tries to do the right thing in his everyday life such as being professional with his customers and doing his job to the best of his abilities. *Clerks* is therefore able to elicit laughter, confusion, and indifference born from the display of absurdities from featured characters, despite the presence of a passive main character in the film. Therefore, through the use of formal innovations—in a film that tells a story of the common/every-day man, and the conversations that drive their equally common existence—the audience is able to emotionally immerse themselves into the story.

4.2.3. *Tape* (2001)

Tape is a 2001 film by Richard Linklater, co-starring Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman and Robert Sean Leonard. The film is shot on digital video (in an era in which digital production was prevalent in the American film industry). It is a one-room, real-time production centred around three friends: Vince, Jon and Amy who reunite and revisit an event from their past. Jon (played by Robert Sean Leonard) faces a significant moment in his life when he visits his old friend,

Vince (played by Ethan Hawke) in a motel room in Lansing. After a decade, Vince seemingly harbours resentments for Jon. Their mutual high school friend Amy who is an assistant district attorney also lives in Lansing. At motel room, the friends ruminate about their school days which leads to serious accusations as well as anger and unresolved feelings amongst them. The film is set entirely in Vince's motel room, and the story is set in motion when Jon attends the premier of his movie at the Lansing Film Festival in Michigan. Like *Clerks*, *Tape* relies heavily on dialogue and performance. Additionally, the film adopts an innovative approach to its use of mise-en-scène in order to elicit emotions in the audience.

Tape is able to build event identification (not merely character identification) and sustain emotional engagement as the audience can connect the events within the action space to the real world. The film makes it possible for the audience to involve themselves with the event in the action space which crucially comprises an initial acknowledgement of the concept of time and the subsequent immersion in dialogue: observing the story events from the perspective of the real world, and while taking into account, the time, space dialogue and performance that produces the event. Daniel Smith-Rowsey notes in *American Cinema of the 2010s: Themes and Variations* that "the domain of single-take films is a subset of the domain of 'real-time' films (which take as much time as their depicted events)" (Smith-Rowsey, 2022: 248). He further notes that Linklater adopts this approach to explore the "structural temporality in narrative cinema" but also that real-time/single-take films "formally call our attention to the relentless passing of time or of the feeling of being trapped in, and perhaps sometimes transcending time" (Smith-Rowsey, 2022: 248). Hence, time traps the audience within the action space, and performance psychologically moves the audience within the spatiotemporal system.

An understanding of how emotion is evoked in *Tape* can be considered through how emotions are linked to thoughts and memories. In *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, Noël Carroll examines what he describes as "core emotions" or "garden variety emotions" (Carroll, 1999: 23) as considerations in film analysis. He posits that "the degree to which our experience of movies is emotional is so extensive that we may lose sight if it" (ibid.). Nevertheless, through analysis of both self and the text—he notes—individuals become aware that they are "generally in some emotional state [...] prompted and modulated by what is on screen" (ibid.). The limitlessness of the factors generated from the consideration of the range of emotions offered during any given viewing experience is instigated by the biological nature that exists in all individuals, and thereby with which we respond emotionally to what we see on screen. This notion is highlighted by Carroll E. Izard, Deborah Z. Libero, Priscilla Putnam and Maurice Haynes in their discussion on the *Stability of Emotion Experiences and their*

Relations to Traits of Personality. They note that specific core emotions, through the concept of "discrete emotion" theory (Izard et al, 1993: 853) are universally understood both in the recognition of such emotions and in the way they are expressed, due to the biological underpinnings of such responses.

On Carroll's argument about the awareness inspired by reflection through the engagement an individual has with the screen: it is not merely that the audience is able to experience emotion as part of their viewing experience. Instead, the value and meaning of the exercise is rooted in the way such emotions are constructed and presented to the audience— and at the very least—in how information, codes and methods are established and communicated in filmmaking. Hence, in order to achieve emotions such as fear, anger or contempt in the audience, there is an initial structuring by the filmmaker by way of "emotionally organising scenes and sequences" and through a selection of "what features of the events in the film are salient" (Carroll, 1999: 29). This echoes Bell's argument (in Chapter 4.2) on how *significant form* (Bell 1913: 11) in art is achieved through the arrangement and combination of forms and codes in a way that moves the audience collectively. In film, the filmmaker is able to evoke certain emotions by accounting for "camera position and composition, editing, lighting, the use of colour, […] acting and the very structure of the script or narrative" (Carroll,1999: 29). *Tape* adheres to this basic objective of generating emotional value in film. Since the film is set solely within the confines of the motel room, the film's composition—through its arrangement of images/visual elements—staging, framing, depth, balance, as well as the presentation of the action space become crucial to achieving certain emotional responses in, and convey meaning to, the audience.

The visual style of the film includes several key moments of dialogue with the utilisation of repeated fast pan camera movements from one character to another. This formal device helps to maintain the uniformity of real time and movie time existence through the interaction between characters within the action space, and for an uninterrupted time—an approach that also draws attention to the number of cameras in use. Hence, the production speed, in addition to the use of specific filming technologies—which facilitate a more immersive experience with the characters on screen—has an impact on the style of performance adopted. The camera therefore achieves an uncomfortable intimacy in several moments during the film, especially when both characters are conversing while sat on either side of a coffee table with a dimly lit lamp above them. As their interaction progresses (and before Amy arrives at the motel) Vince begins to interrogate Jon on his past sexual exploits. Vince, through his line of questioning, implies that Jon may have been inappropriate with Amy in their past relationship.

Figure 4.1.9 – Vince and Jon in conversation

The audience is able to maintain interest in the way the conversation progresses. The reader will recall that on the discussion of cognitive film theory, the subject of 'interest' was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2.3. The thesis suggested that emotional mechanisms employed and manifested in/through the audience are rooted in cognition which requires interest in the film characters and the world in which they exist; and such interest could be formed through curiosity or passion. As Vince and Jon's conversation grows increasingly tense, the discomfort elicited from their conversation is accompanied by the camera shot sizes which simultaneously become closer, tightly framing the characters' faces as they converse. This technique allows for the audience to become enthralled in dialogue as well the characters' facial feedback to the dialogue within the frame. The use of two cameras here preserves the integrity of performance in a way that evokes a variety of emotions such as intrigue and disgust. Crucially, the cameras are able to cut to each character's facial feedback in response to the other's questions and thereby generate a level of affect that builds intrigue (curiosity) in the dialogue, which in turn elicits emotion (passion) in the audience.

Figure 4.2.1 – Interrogation sequence 1

Anger is evoked through Vince's line of inquiry which can be read as an act that stems from sheer boredom, resentment, or both, as opposed to an inquiry born from moral indignation and a quest for truth. There is also a sense of partial disgust elicited through Jon's responses.

This judgement is also achieved through mood cues which helps with character identification for the elicitation of emotion. The element of identification is crucial here because, as Jonathan Cohen (in *Psychology of Entertainment*) argues, it contains "both affective [empathy] and cognitive [understanding goals and motives, perspective-taking] components" (Cohen, 2006: 185). Cohen further notes that identification "provides […] several important keys to fictional involvement. Identification with a character provides a point of view on the plot; it leads to an understanding of character motivations, an investment in the outcome of events, and a sense of intimacy and emotional connection with a character" (Cohen, 2006: 184). Hence, disgust in the moment mentioned above is elicited in the audience through the possibility that Jon raped Amy in the past (purely based on the level of confidence that Vince exudes when questioning Jon). However, the calm, thoughtful delivery in Jon's response (in juxtaposition to Vince's apathetic demeanour and approach to the subject) offers hope to, and identification from the audience with Jon, and opens the audience to the possibility that the accusation may be false, or in the very least, that the event did not happen in the manner in which it is being framed by Vince.

Figure 4.2.2 – Interrogation sequence 2 (close-up shots)

Disgust as an emotion was previously mentioned in Chapter 2.3.2. Plantinga's suggestion that psychoanalytic film theorists tend to focus on cinematic affects through human pleasure and desire was highlighted. He proposes a need to focus on other forms of emotion including, "fear, pity, admiration, disgust, and compassion" (Plantinga, 2009: 86). However, it is worth noting that "concern-based" (Plantinga, 2009: 203) construal of emotion such as disgust require an initial clarification on the specific type of concerns that comprises such emotions. Plantinga proposes two conceptions for the consideration of film-elicited disgust, namely through the relationship between "physical disgust" (a combination of Jonathan Haidt's "core" and "animal-reminder" elements of disgust [Plantinga, 2009: 205] as well as "sociomoral disgust" (Plantinga, 2009: 203). The relationship between the physical and sociomoral aspects of disgust

can be found in how such an innate/affective emotion is harnessed in social, psychological, and ideological concerns.

In everyday society, disgust can function as a governing tool: to regulate human behaviour, maintain social hierarchy and can also serve as justification for the marginalisation of certain groups of people. Recent examples of this would be the societal reaction to the Ebola outbreak of 2014 as well as the Coronavirus outbreak of 2019 which saw the castigation of African and Chinese nationals in both cases and in many societies across the globe as "monkey eaters" and "bat eaters" respectively. Such examples demonstrate the "marked social component" (Plantinga, 2009: 205) of physical and sociomoral disgust. This stems from an identification of some physical parameters of what is *unclean* to physically consume (and therefore of what is and is not socially acceptable to consume), the societal implication for defaulting from what is acceptable within such physical parameters, and hence the physical reaction to the discovery of such deviations of societal standards). Instances such as those highlighted above therefore show how disgust can be used in society to regulate, stigmatise, and even condemn members/groups in a society.

A closer consideration of sociomoral disgust reveals/signifies specific social parameters that are adhered to within cultural practices and norms, so that an association of disgust to any dereliction or deviation of/from such norms is due to an *inherent ill* within an individual or the self, and an aversion to the disorder that such negligence produces. The thesis' suggestion that disgust is invoked via dialogue in *Tape* is in reference to this idea. The audience perceives the conversation between Vince and Jon as an indication of a disorder within the social parameters, through the subject of rape. The audience is therefore placed on the defensive, to protect the established norms that prevent the disorder, and the defensiveness is exhibited through an expression of disgust at the mere suspicion that the basic social parameters have been violated. The friction that shrouds each passing moment of interaction between Vince and Jon reveals the affective programming of the film's form. The emotional response elicited is therefore not *explicit*, or *passing,* but achieved through an initial engagement with the self and subsequent reading of the text (an idea which was previously highlighted by citing Carroll, 1999: 23). That is, the film's form of the gradual insertion of inflammatory elements to dialogue produces not simply feeling states but cognitive states. (The reader will recall the discussion in Chapter 2.3 that highlighted the cognitive components of emotion through the works of scholars such as Carroll and Choi [2006] and Plantinga [2016]).

The emotions that are provoked in such cognitive states then amounts to what Silvan Tomkins describes as "innate affect programmes" as well as "learned affect program activators" (Tomkins, 2008: 135) in the real world, and they are controlled through formalism

in film. The former term, Tomkins explains, refers to "what is inherited as a subcortical structure which can instruct and control a variety of muscles and glands to respond with unique patterns of rate and duration of activity characteristic of a given affect" (ibid.). The latter term references "modifications in the affect program activators which are the result of learning." (ibid.). Tomkins' former term therefore applies to the self while the latter applies to the text. It has now been established how affective emotion is provided to the audience on a sociomoral level. However, the emotion is also extended to Vince's character due to the level of heedlessness with which he approaches the subject, a disposition that deviates from the now established defensiveness of the audience.

Linklater, through camera work (and through "emotionally organising scenes and sequences" as previously highlighted by Noël Carroll, [1999: 29]) reveals to the audience, the experimental nature of reality: no life event is intransigent. This is evident in the persistent of real-time action amalgamating with the action time and space. The quality of "formal innovation" highlighted in Chapter 4.2.1 with regards to *smart* cinema is applicable here also, because the experimental form that *Tape* takes directly "question[s] and undermine[s] genre conventions" (King, 2005: 165). It can be argued also that *Tape* has the hallmarks of a Dogme film, as it upholds some of Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg's *Vow of Chastity* from the 1995 filmmaking movement. For example, the film utilises diegetic sound throughout. It is also shot in colour without the use of special effects and contains no superficial action, relying on purely dialogue and performance to move the story forward (Utterson, 2005: 87). The characters in *Tape* can be described as intricate in nature and the audience has no expectation of what each character is capable of up until their real-time action is revealed. Hence, the audience experiences their personalities, behaviours and capabilities unfold, as if observing through a looking glass.

The character of Vince, through his apathy, reveals a man who is at peace with his many flaws and lifestyle (including drug-dealing and partying) while Jon, through his gentle disposition, is presented as a character who has his life together. However, passing moments of the film reveals a man who struggles with his identity, both morally and socially. In one sequence, the following dialogue ensues between Jon and Vince:

> Jon: I'm a very thoughtful person who happens to like nice shoes.
> Vince: And is occasionally full of shit.
> Jon: Is there something I'm not doing that you want me to do, Vince?
> Vince: I don't want you to do anything.
> Jon: No? Because it seems like I'm being asked to do something by a 28-year-old pot dealer, who doesn't have the guts to progress with the rest of society.

There is a perception that Jon is desperate for Vince's approval and seems eager for his friend's validation of his life choices, even though, by his own admission, Vince is irresponsible. This

perception evokes interest and shame in the audience which stems from an identification of/with both the excesses and deficiencies in the moral makeup of both characters.

When Jon admits to the possibility of date-rape, Vince reveals to Jon that he has been recording their conversation. Jon is left aghast, and his emotion is sustained until Amy arrives at the motel room. The conversation between the trio opens up new possibilities on memory and perception and the lines become blurred as to what is fact and what is fabrication. Jon excuses himself from the room at one point and Vince and Amy are alone. Vince expresses to Amy, "He admitted it to me". The camera frame tightens to a close-up shot of Amy's facial feedback to reveal her horror as she asks Vince, "What did you do?" The following conversation the ensues:

> Vince: I got him to admit it. It's on the tape.
> Amy: Admit what?
> Vince: That night. Am I wrong? Rape. He raped you.
> Amy: Why would that be any of your business.
> Vince: You don't understand, I'm trying to do the right thing.
> Amy: Is that really what you mean, Vince? I don't think it is.
> Vince: I thought you would appreciate it.
> Amy: Well, I don't. Because he didn't rape me.
> Vince: What?
> Amy: He didn't, so the only person you're trying to make feel better, is yourself.

Figure 4.2.3 – Amy and Vince: Revelation sequence

As the film progresses from the point of the *Revelation sequence*, it becomes harder to determine if Amy was indeed raped or not as her embodied emotions continue to shift, both through facial feedback and body language. She increasingly becomes nonchalant about the subject and at other moments in the film, she appears to harbour deep pain on the matter which can be perceived as an indication of anger, shame, or contempt.

Carroll notes that "so often, characters wear the meanness of their actions on their sleeve" (Carroll, 1999: 29). Noteworthily, such revelations can also come from other characters within the movie space or can be provided by film form such as music or lighting. Hence, by way of "finding […] depictions […] of the object of the emotion that satisfy the necessary criteria for

being in whatever emotional state the audience is in" (Carroll, 1999: 33), the film is able to elicit the *learned affect program activators* through such emotions as anger, shame and guilt. This is because the film form has provided the emotive structure through which the audience can identify Amy's emotional state and basic emotion cues.

Jon returns to the motel later in the film to apologise, and Amy calls the police on both Jon and Vince, for sexual assault and possession of illegal substances, respectively. In the end, the audience is offered reconciliation from the moral ambiguity that has plagued the two men throughout the film: Jon is willing to pay the price for his wrongdoings, however long ago it may have happened. Vince, despite his many flaws, decides not to run (although he flushes his drugs down the toilet). As Amy leaves the room, she reveals that she has not in fact called the police, to Jon and Vince's astonishment. Amy's sudden confession ends the audience's interest for the truth surrounding the supposed events ten years prior, and in so doing, the film provides renewed knowledge by revealing the capabilities of each character. Both Jon and Vince's moral inclinations are laid bare to the audience through the character of Amy. Slowly, the truth about the supposed date-rape no longer matters and the defensiveness that was evoked in the audience at the start of Vince and Jon's conversation is diminished.

Through the film's formal structure and theme, the ability to, and the psychological process involved in, revisiting events of the past—in the here and now—reveals how emotionally engaging film can be. As Carroll (1999: 33) suggests, the way a film arouses emotions can be determined through an initial recognition of the emotions elicited in the film followed by an analysis on how said emotion is constructed. Hence, the characters of Vince, Jon, and eventually Amy—through an observation of their embodied emotions—serve as vessels through which certain truths about self and therefore the text are revealed.

4.3. Storytelling in Indie Films

In *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement* Carl Plantinga considers immersion and emotion through the principles of engagement. He demonstrates how both concepts function in storytelling. About immersion in a narrative context, he posits that it:

> […] requires all sorts of active and reflective mental activities on the part of the viewer. We anticipate future events, test hypotheses about what might happen, make sense of sometimes complicated fictional worlds, fill in gaps in the narrative, and engage in moral judgments of the characters. (Plantinga, 2018: 123)

His exploration into 'Estrangement Theories' though, identifies an anti-narrative approach to the understanding of film. Primarily, the "ethics of estrangement" proposes an attitude towards

narrative that "short-circuits the viewer's emotional engagement with the story" (Plantinga, 2018: 101). Consequently, estrangement theories bear heavy scepticism of storytelling and the emotional responses it produces because it pays attention to "individuals rather than contexts […] for the elicitation of emotions that are thought to be mystifying, and for promoting immersion in the fictional story [which lead to] passivity and mental paralysis". (Plantinga, 2018: 101). (The thesis will revisit Plantinga's analysis of immersion in a narrative context in Chapter 7 when discussing *John Q.* and *My Sister's Keeper* to show how engaging in "moral judgements" of film characters helps to create emotional connections with such characters). Estrangement theories therefore propose techniques and styles that produce an alienated response and critical thought in the audience since an immersion in the film narrative, characters and plots lead to inactivity.

The assumptions posited through estrangement theory are rather prematurely assumptive as narratives arguably produce critical thought. Plantinga notes that emotions derived from screen, and through their narrative context, function in different ways that "elicit 'critical thinking' rather than complacent acceptance" (Plantinga, 2018: 133). Aside from the ability of a story to evoke critical thought through immersion, the latter concept is also beneficial in understanding film texts. Such functions and qualities will continue to be examined in this chapter as well as in the coming chapters. Sigmund Freud likewise argues for an immersed narrative experience in *20th Century Theories of Art,* noting that:

> […] all the [a]esthetic pleasure we gain from the world of imaginative writers is of the same type as this "fore-pleasure", and that the true enjoyment of literature proceeds from the release of tension in our minds. Perhaps much that brings about this result consists in the writer's putting us into a position in which we can enjoy our own daydreams without reproach or shame. (Freud, 1990: 131)

As he suggests, stories tend to hide their deepest meaning and can be harnessed through an openness of mind and an overcoming of conflicts that could hinder our understanding of the story.

Freud also argues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the *pleasure principle* is a primary requirement for critical thinking, but this is often interrupted by the *reality principle* due to the impulse of *self-preservation* (Freud, 2015: 9). Hence:

> [The reality principle] does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands […] the postponement of satisfaction […] and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure. The pleasure principle long persists, however, as the method of working employed by the sexual instincts, which are so hard to 'educate', and […] often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole. (Freud, 2015: 9)

Here, Freud suggests that there are biological/innate factors are play in the experience of art and the world. When applied to film in relation to cognitivism, it is important to examine what

formal elements in film allow for the suspension of the reality principle and equally, what components allow for the pleasure principle to be sustained within the cinematic experience.

In order to provide a pathway through which we might theorise emotion and affect in independent cinema, the thesis will continue to examine how these concepts exist within indie films. An eventual proposition of the ways in which critical thinking functions through an engagement with affect, and an immersion of the film, will be provided at the end of the thesis. Arguably though, the departure from the classical narrative structure in indie filmmaking (covered in Chapter 4.1.1) allows for the principle of reality to be sustained in the viewing experience and is arguably well established before the pleasure principle emerges. One way this is achieved is through mood cues by way of film form, which is sustained through the context of storytelling. Since indie films are not typically bound by the classical narrative style, the mood (and tone) of the film is often stabilised throughout the movie (which allows for a deeper immersion into the story by way of the reality principle). These instances will be explored through *Return of the Secaucus 7* (1979, John Sayles).

4.3.1. Return of the Secaucus 7 (1979)

Return of the Secaucus is a 1979 film by John Sayles that introduces the audience to seven friends (Mike, Katie, Frances, J.T., Irene, Maura and Jeff) who reunite at one of their friend's homes for a weekend. The film slowly reveals the dynamics of the relationship amongst the friends. Jon Lewis in *American Film: A History* describes *Return of the Secaucus 7* as a film about "a handful of twentysomethings set adrift in contemporary America" (Lewis, 2008: 392). He adds that the film is "reflective" and "personal" (ibid.) in style. This is achieved through the use of long format dialogues that are presented through expository storytelling. That is, when a question is asked by one character it is directly answered by another character, but the answers are delivered in a way that informs not just the inquiring character, but also the audience, as though they were a part of the conversation whilst existing apart from the shared experiences of the characters on screen. This format will be expanded on shortly.

It was explained in Chapter 2.3.1 that it is possible to have a "satisfying cinematic experience" (Ward, 2015: 158) through an "affective spatio-temporal system" (Ward, 2015: 159) without experiencing narrative. It was also noted that "spatial and temporal change" performs the function of establishing "the properties of events and objects" (Handel, 1998: 315) in a film. The engagement with the story is established through the mise-en-scène in *Secaucus 7* and is achieved through spatial organisation. In several scenes where the group of friends are embroiled in conversation, they are organised in a cluster within their surrounding

as if stacked on top of each other. The use of transitions between camera angles is very limited in the film and is only utilised when other characters within the established space are farther away from the others. The limited number of cameras in use thereby controls the number of cuts used in the film. This aesthetic approach means that the film becomes heavily reliant on not just dialogue, but on long-form dialogues. The audience's engagement with the characters through storytelling is therefore affective in the way in which form is employed, and such engagements are not reliant on the characters assuming an active position that transforms the story in drastic ways. Rather, it simply compels the audience to partake in the presented dialogue as it reveals more about each of the characters. The expository format employed in the dialogue means that the audience is able to maintain a stabilised interest throughout the film without an experience of narrative.

Figure 4.2.4 – Spatial organisation: breakfast scene and jail scene

It was noted in Chapter 2.2.1 by Bordwell that in Hollywood films, "a specific sort of narrative causality operates as the dominant" (Bordwell, 2019: 12); and by Maltby, that storytelling serves as a vehicle in film which "holds its component parts together, sequences them, and provides an explanation or justification for that sequencing" (Maltby, 2003: 453). Since the classical narrative structure is dominated by the equilibrium-disequilibrium-new equilibrium form, the formal techniques adopted are used as a vehicle through which the audience anticipates/leans into such established codes because the expectation for emotion are bound as such that a shift in plot (and therefore tone) is imminent. In *Secaucus 7*, the audience's expectation of the story is only bound by what the characters themselves permit. The audience is able to vicariously immerse themselves into the characters' lives through other characters in the story acting as *de facto or unconscious narrators*. (By this, the thesis means that the audience relies on any one of the characters at any moment in the film, to explain situations surrounding another character's life. Additionally, the role that said character plays in enlightening the audience on the dynamics that exist within the group and on events within the

story, is adopted unbeknownst to the character. That is, they are not actively seeking to inform the audience as they are unaware that there is an onstage action at play).

Inaction—both with character positioning and in camera movement within the spatial organisation—in most of the film's scenes, extends in the direction of the embodiment of emotion within the movie space. Through expository language (rather than in the utilisation of other filmic elements such as camera angle and movement), characters' discrete emotions are revealed to the audience. Hence, inaction is replaced by dialogue while embodied emotion in the film is orated rather than performed. In one scene, the character of J.T. contemplates telling Jeff (Maura's ex-boyfriend) about his involvement with Maura. As he hesitates to have the conversation, the following conversation with Maura ensues:

> J.T.: I feel funny.
> Maura: I don't. It makes things clear.
> J.T.: I feel weird.
> Maura: We're definite this way.
> J.T.: I feel awful.

The embodied emotion elicited through expository language allows for the audience to have a clear-cut understanding of the character's mental state. Crucially, it ensures that whatever action follows the dialogue, is rendered insignificant to the audience's understanding of J.T.'s state of mind, because such an understanding has already been achieved through his own proclamations.

It can be argued that *Secaucus 7* serves as a smart film in the way the audience is able to follow the story and understand each character through the use of form. To expound on Sconce's arguments from Chapter 4.2.1 on the philosophical qualities of film, he notes that the cinema in which *smart* films are represented exemplify cinematic sensibilities with "a shared set of stylistic narrative and thematic elements deployed in differing configurations by individual films" (Sconce, 2002: 358). A part of these shared elements includes a "blank style and incongruous narration" (ibid.) which depart from the classical narrative style. This is because the "narrative causality" (Bordwell, 2019: 12) that drives mainstream storytelling relies on agents of causality (either of featured events or through screen characters) to navigate through such a structure. In the case of smart films as Sconce argues, the utilisation of a nonlinear narrative structure often allows for the story to represent character structure. In *Return of the Secaucus 7*, the story is able to progress without a direct causality pattern. The characters just *exist* within the story, in the here and now, with no interventionist motivations that influences the plot. Hence, (as previously noted by Freud, 2015: 3–4) the audience can immerse themselves into the story through an engagement with the characters by way of the pleasure principle, relying on cognitive engagement (critical thinking) through identification and meaning. Emotion and immersion in *Secaucus 7* are also provided to the audience by way

of the reality principle through a suspension of satisfaction. This is because there is an absence of a means by which immediate satisfaction is achieved, such as the presence of spectacle (that might distract or interrupt the sustainability and presence of the reality principle and therefore, the integrity of the narrative as a coherent event).

As mentioned in Chapter 4.1.1, compositionally constructed classical narratives produce a cause-effect chain which are embodied in the story (also referred to as the "fabula" in Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film,* [1985: 49]). *Secaucus 7'*s narrative can be described as being motivated linguistically since components such as dialogue are replaced by movement and even visual image. When the group of friends are arrested on suspicion of hunting illegally, they pass the time in their jail cell by reminiscing about their college years and recall the inception of their group name 'The Secaucus 7' (see Fig. 4.2.4). The long-form dialogue enables the audience to mentally structure the events that the group recaps without suggestions made through camera movements, cut-ins or cutaway shots to imagery that emphasises dialogue.

The dialogue form is oftentimes artistically motivated in a way that draws attention to its expository nature. Even though all seven friends are present in the jail cell, Mike still notes in conversation with his friends:

> We didn't all know each other that well yet. It was me and Katie and Jeff and Maura... and J.T. and Irene and… Frances. Frances was the other one. We get on the Jersey Turnpike and we're low on gas… so we get off in Secaucus.

Mike's mentioning of each of their names even though they are all participants in the event that he recalls in their presence may seem redundant, but it speaks to the expositive nature of the film's storytelling in the way that it informs the audience—and not the screen characters— through such an emphatic form of communication. It also buttresses the suggestion made previously about the characters serving as *de facto narrators* in the story (dissimilar to the concepts of the omniscient narrator or first-person narrator who, in both instances, are conscious in their knowledge that they know, and do therefore consciously relay their knowledge to *the other*, either about the action or characters in the movie space). The linguistically motivated argument for the narrative structure of the film is justified also in the way that stories told among/about the friends through other characters mimics the storytelling structure of the film itself.

The film also mimics the structure of other literary works such as poems and novels in its use of hyperbole and irony in dialogue. These elements are present in the scene where J.T and Mike have an improvised dialogue in which Mike acts as a teacher, and J.T. a student. They're also present in the jail scene when J.T. expresses that "Every cop on the Eastern Seaboard was out... trying to pick off pinkos on their way to Washington" when he recalls his

college years with his friends. The film also offers mental imagery to the audience in the way that visual style of the film does not, through metaphorical expressions when dialogues ensue among the characters. Thus, *Return of the Secaucus 7* lends itself to several linguistic features and structures that make for an immersive experience through such techniques involved in storytelling. The thesis will now move to explore how the utilisation of sound can also offer a similar immersive experience in film.

4.4. Music and Tone in Indie Film

In the introductory section of the thesis, the subject of *emotional quality* was introduced. To reiterate, the combination of formal elements and components in film, such as the strategic use of music against a specific sequence in a film can be used to invoke a certain emotional quality. The audience attempts to make sense of such combinations which potentially produces an emotional response during, or after the psychological process is involved. It was also mentioned in Chapter 2.3.1 that the element of music in film is able to produce emotion because it is a "multi-parametric construct that operates at an almost subliminal level to support, highlight, complement, or even negate any other aspects of the cinematic experience" (Chattah, 2015: 81). Additionally, Chattah notes that music and sound generate texture and physicality in the way that it is able to expose a screen character's mental state thereby placing the audience within close proximity to the characters in the movie space.

The reader will also recall that the formal component of sound is discussed in the aforementioned chapter, where Sean Cubitt posits that "sound implies time which demands movement which in turn seems to demand the visual" (Cubitt, 2002: 360). The suggestion here is that the use of sound (which also includes the conscious utilisation of the absence of sound when paired with moving image) is paramount to the transition of the moving image. Another important point to note here is that sound "is central to the way in which a film establishes setting, shapes character (dialogue is a constituent part of any performance [as demonstrated in *Return of the Secaucus 7]*), signposts its narrative, directs the audience's attention, and instils general emotional states" (Kuhn and Westwall, 2020: 538). The ability for music and sound to permeate visual imagery in a way that other elements are unable to will continue to be explored through film analysis in this thesis.

There seems to be very little attention paid by scholars to the concept of tone in film criticism. In *Close-up 02,* Douglas Pye echoes this point, noting that "it is a concept which has had a very limited place in film theory and criticism" (Pye and Gibbs, 2007: 6). He further

states that tone plays an important function in film "in enabling us to orientate ourselves to any film. [Additionally,] we seem […] to respond almost instinctively to the various elements in a film's opening that in combination, signal its tone" (ibid.). Hence, formal elements such as sound, music, colour and framing can influence the tone of the film and hence the way emotion is made available to the audience, as well as the range of emotion, through affect, involved in such a process. James MacDowell, writing in *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, posits that:

> A film may practice a greater or lesser number of conventions, but the key factor in whether or not it will feel like a participant in [a] sensibility (for feeling is, unfortunately, crucial) is likely to be its tone. (MacDowell, 2012: 10)

Sensibility here can be loosely translated to the adoption of a particular approach to understanding of the world. In a filmic context therefore, aesthetics ensures that the audience "can both seem self-conscious and promote an appreciation of naïveté" (MacDowell, 2012: 10) and depending on the film's aesthetics, its tone is able to produce emotional engagement with the film's world.

When a film deviates, experiments or manipulates in/with its use of such elements in a way that is counter to *habituality* and established codes, it:

> "[…] makes it difficult immediately to say what kind of thing it is [and] it can be an uncomfortable or disorientating experience. And even movies that seem to establish their tone straightforwardly can hold all sorts of tonal surprises in store" (Pye and Gibbs, 2007: 6).

In Quentin Tarantino's 1992 film *Reservoir Dogs*, for example, the *torture* scene features Mr. Blonde (Michael Madsen), a sadistic mobster who tortures Marvin Nash, a police officer (played by Kirk Baltz) by cutting his face and ear off. The gruesome event is set against the music *Stuck in the Middle with You* (Stealers Wheel). The manipulation of formal elements which juxtaposes gore with upbeat rock music (and performance from Mr. Blonde), influences the way the audience feels about the event on screen. The ironic contrast of music plays a crucial role in making an uncomfortable scene more palatable to the audience by drawing focus to the truly psychopathic nature of Mr. Blonde rather than the gruesome visuals that are unfolding on screen. Hence, the emotion provided by such scenes (such as surprise, disgust and interest) assumes a kind of quality in the manner in which such emotions are offered in a range, but also on how they are achieved in such a short space of time within the viewing experience. Additionally, the affective state of shock that the film invokes (through the combination of film elements such as sound and the performance that accompany the other emotions), is indicative of how tone—in conjunction with the utilisation of formal devices— plays an important function in film.

The way music is adopted in the *torture* scene and the resulting response from its construction allows such phenomenon to be termed "incongruent film music" by Ágnes Pethő

in *Cinema of Sensations* (Pethő, 2015: 103). She approaches this concept through the study of emotion and argues that "conflicting soundtracks generate an emotional impact that is of a substantially different nature than the affect of traditional, congruent film scores" (Pethő, 2015: 104). This allows for music to be reflected as an affective device in this thesis in two ways: Music is used artistically through its engineering in order to provide meaning through lyrical content against visual imagery. Also, music is used compositionally to establish how tone and texture provides meaning through emotion. The thesis now moves to explore such conceptions of music and the ideas surrounding the subject of tone in the 2015 indie film *Broken Flowers.*

4.4.1. *Broken Flowers* (2005)

Broken Flowers is a 2005 film by Jim Jarmusch and follows Don Johnston (played by Bill Murray), who lives a rather reclusive life. The film opens with Don's girlfriend Sherry leaving him. When Don inquires why, she replies, "It's the way you are and you're never gonna change". The passivity with which he approaches life is echoed throughout the film and is highlighted through music, tone, and theme. The only moment in the film where Don assumes an *active*/less passive behaviour is at his neighbour Winston's house. Don can be seen playing with Winston's children and interacting with his (Winston's) wife. When he informs Winston (played by Jeffery Wright) about his breakup, Winston says, "I'm sorry she left", to which he responds, "Yeah, me too. I think." His inability to process or express his emotions in any given situation is further amplified by the film's use of music and sound in many scenes which often generates ironic and dysfunctional patterns and humour. Such techniques ensure that the audience can create an understandable relationship with Don by processing his mental state and feelings in a way that Don himself either refuses to or is incapable of doing. Don receives an anonymous letter in the mail suggesting that he may have fathered a child twenty years prior. The writer of the letter also adds that the supposed son may be searching for him in the present moment. When Don informs Winston about the letter, Winston urges Johnston to visit his old girlfriends in order to find out who the mother of the supposed child might be. Don's journey is relatively uneventful as he gathers very few answers during his experience.

Character mental and emotional state is revealed though diegetic music in *Broken Flowers*. Patricia Pisters explores realistic and expressionistic sounds in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*. She posits that expressionistic soundtracks are "internally motivated and could be described as 'what the character feels is what we hear'" (Pisters, 2014: 119). The scenes that feature Don in his living room, his stereo becomes his *voice* in a way that reveals his mood and thoughts to the audience. After Don

discovers that he might have a son, he sits in his dimly lit living room, with *Pie Jesu* playing from his stereo. His motionless disposition along with the lighting and music reveals a state of hopelessness and gloom. The blending of dark colours of both his clothes and furniture also amplifies the film's banality project. When Winston expresses to Don, "You give me a list of all your girlfriends from back then, and then I can plan everything", Don becomes motivated to write a list. Don plays the "groovin' CD" that Winston burned for him earlier that day as he writes his list. The tone of the scene is in direct contrast to the scene mentioned above as it elicits hope for the possibility of change. That is, there is a feeling that Don's list is bringing on emotions of nostalgia and memories of his past, even though Don does not express these emotions outwardly, his music choice suggests that such emotions are embodied. It is crucial to restate here that the element of music can serve as an affective device in film. It is argued that the technique serves to compensate for character absence or inactivity within a scene. Thus, music is an affective affect, because it adds further context to an already perceptual state.

As was explained in Chapter 2.3.4, affect as a concept in discourse is used in the same terms as its nature and manifestation in its application to everyday life. That is, it is utilised in terms of its "contextual" (Massumi, 2002: 30), "unconscious" (Singh, 2014: 21) and "unintentional" (Plantinga, 2009: 87) nature and in terms of the way it manifests "quality and power" (Deleuze, 1983: 97). Since music permeates form through such engineering in film, it functions the same way in its nature and manifestation in film texts because it decontextualises the moving image through its engagement with form through its engineering. Furthermore, it measures the level of intensity or apathy of the visual image. Music is therefore affective in two ways: firstly, through the formal components that accompany the soundtrack and secondly, in the way that it is not only affective in the components that accompany said music, but in the way it imitates affect's nature through an unconscious management of permeability of such soundtracks for the provision of meaning.

Figure 4.2.5 – 'Affectiveness' of music to connote hopelessness and gloom

It is argued that in addition to Pister's realistic and expressionistic modules of sound and music in film, there are also provisions for music that assumes physicality as well as music that

engages with the audience through undertaking a voiceover role in film. In one scene in the film, Don is sitting by himself in his living room, in what can be perceived as a pattern of his at this point in the film. As Marvin Gaye's, *I Want You* plays on his stereo, he sits in silence with a bottle of Moët. The romantic setup of the scene invokes ironic humour as it suggests that Don is pitiful and alone, having no one to share the moment with. Hence, the "distanced perspective" provided by the film puts Jon into an "embarrassing" situation in a way that dispels his "potential sympathetic force through comedy and irony" (Plantinga, 2009: 171). The long take shot, paired against Don's immobility also makes the scene rather uncomfortable for the audience because the camera focuses on the objects around Don—the champagne bottle, glass, and flowers—rather than on Don himself. The camera technique employed here emphasises inactivity and unresponsiveness and draws focus on objects that would ordinarily not be a point of focus. Hence, the meaninglessness elicited in the scene then becomes a metaphor for Don's life.

Since the audience is able to orient themselves with such visible formal choices, the music in the background then serves an important role in questioning its relevance. Due to Don's stagnancy, the music thence assumes synthesised physicality as an *artificial body* (similar to that of a ghost) in addressing Don directly. The music shifts meaning through its lyrical content to accommodate the scene's tonal structure through a recontextualisation from figurative to literal meaning. The lines in the music's lyrics, "Don't play with something you should cherish for life. Don't you want to care? Ain't it lonely out there?" as Don sits motionless functions in a way that chastises him and urges him to make changes in his life.

Figure 4.2.6 – 'Affectiveness' of music to imply irony and elicit judgement

Again, such interpretations are made possible through the scene's mise-en-scène, its establishment of a tonal structure, and its literal approach to music. Insofar as Don embodies inactivity, it allows for the music to become the subject and Don, the object of the emotion (frustration and judgement). Don sits and listens to the cautioning words of music that serves

as its own body. Hence music through film form, is not merely an affect, but is also affective. Musicologist Leonard Sabaneev argues that:

> Music should understand that in the cinema it should nearly always remain in the background: it is, so to speak, a tonal configuration, the left hand of the melody on the screen, and it is a bad business when this left hand begins to creep into the foreground and obscure the melody. (Sabneev in Gobman, 1987: 76)

The subject of *inaudibility* of music is also discussed by Greg Smith. He maintains that while image is consciously perceived by the audience, film music is unconsciously perceived. He adds that "music cues are so clearly motivated functionally [because] they are not foregrounded as highly visible (or rather, audible) emotion cues" (Smith, 2003: 56). He posits this argument in relation to mainstream films, adding that such films aspire towards realism and since there are no soundtracks in real life, the music must reflect in the subconscious. However, the engineering of diegetic music artificially in mainstream films is not necessarily applicable to techniques adopted by indie films.

The meaning conveyed through music in *Broken Flowers* is not lead by—or generated from—the dictates of narrative due to the inactive form the film adopts. Therefore, there are no accompanying elements present on screen that can overpower music. Arguably, action in indie films is either subdued, stagnant, or antithetical to the musical scoring in its artistic design. This is utilised either to draw the audience into the movie space of the music, as a means of distracting from action, or in the case of *Broken Flowers*, compensating for inaction. By so doing, it mocks the action in the scene by providing a cognitive opening through a prolonged moment in which the audience is able to dwell on the message that the scene demands and encourages an emotional response.

It was previously mentioned that music can produce physicality as well as assume a voiceover role in film. The reader will recall Susan Langer's position on music structure in Chapter 2.3.3 in which she notes that the "analogous" and "isomorphic" nature of film music "is the prime requisite for the relation between a symbol and whatever it is to mean" (Langer, 1953: 27). In the opening of *Broken Flowers*, the title credits are marked by the song *There is An End* by The Greenhornes. The lyrical connotations in the words, "I tried to see through the skies, but the clouds were there blocking out the sun" foreshadows the events of the film. But the physicality generated here is not artificial as in the case of the Marvin Gaye sequence. Rather, it is assigned against an existing body off-screen and at the time in which the music plays. The music thence serves as voiceover narration by the signifying character. It can therefore be argued that Don is relaying to the audience, through music, the futility of his pending journey to finding a new path in life through his search of his son. The *voiceover music* in the opening title is accompanied by clouded sky imagery which occurs after a momentary blackout screen. The form paired with the music therefore connotes the cloudiness and opacity

that is to be associated with Don's fruitless journey.

The use of diegetic sound is equally important in *Broken Flowers* and an equally crucial element in establishing form and meaning. Kuhn and Westwall explain that sound in film functions to "set mood or elicit a particular emotional response from the audience" (Kuhn and Westwall, 2020: 539). At several moments in the film, the audience is able to see the world through Don's point of view and reveal his inner thoughts and contempt for human beings. In one scene, Don is on a bus and watches on as two young girls have a chat in his opposite direction. The shot remains on Don as he listens in on their conversation. In another scene, Don is sitting on a bench at the airport. His focus gradually shifts to the lady next to him who is fixated on crossword puzzles. Don's gaze shifts to the lady's legs and up at her newspaper before looking away. In a third scene, Don is at Carmen's animal behaviour practice. In the waiting room, his gaze moves from the secretary's legs to the shelves in the room. The unconventional construction of the male gaze in all three scenes—accompanied by diegetic sounds—is built in a way that creates an ironic distance from the objects of the gaze. Don's shift in gaze from their legs to the objects that surround them (newspapers and books) speaks to his detachment from any kind of pleasurable experience (at least in terms of the provisions offered by the male gaze) and the disgust and passivity that he truly feels about everything he comes across.

Figure 4.2.7 – Ironic distance through diegetic sound

As Don sets out on the road, the landscape shots signal the absurdity and futility of the quest due to the banality, *sameness,* and mundanity in form. Don plays his CDs given to him by Winston in the car as he travels. (Winston had previously said to Don in conversation, "Ethiopian sounds, it's good for the heart"). The repetitiveness of the jazz music heightens the audience's sense of repetition which suggests that Don's trip is unlikely to produce any real

value. Towards the end of the film, it becomes clear that Don cannot fix his past or reconnect with anyone from it. As he returns home, rather unceremoniously, his journey merely reveals to him that he continues to make the same mistakes that he has made in the past. Don returns home empty-handed having learnt nothing about his supposed son or even the writer of the letter. The uneventfulness of his return also signals to the audience that the repetitiveness that surrounds Don's existence is one that will be persistent long after the events of the film.
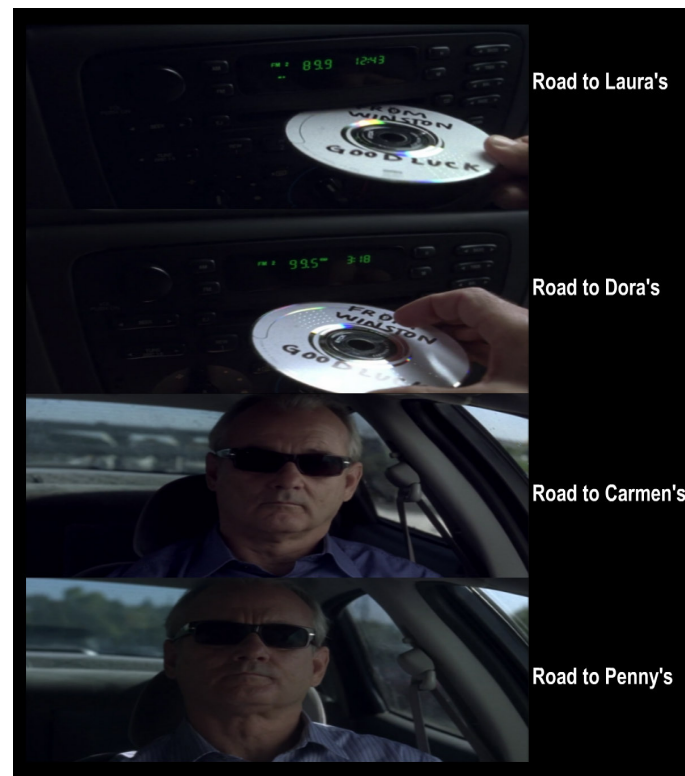
Figure 4.2.8 – The persistence of banality

Movies: A Journal of Film Criticism, David Hughes, in his analysis of the closing scene in *Hostiles* (2012, Scott Cooper) posits that:

> We have experienced close-ups, but the tracking motion sets it apart. It is the only time this mobile formal move has been executed in the movie, and the sense that, alongside the music, it implies an endpoint […] dramatises the feeling of something being arrived at. We are not told what to think, or feel, but we are invited to think, or feel, something. (Hughes, 2020: 88)

Similarly, in *Broken Flowers*, many scenes utilise static shots. Many of the scenes are devoid of camera movement: Even as Don is on the road, the camera remains stationary outside of the vehicle. The closing scene of the film adopts a contrasting form to the rest of the film with the use of an arc shot. As the wind continues to whistle around Don, the camera circles him and eventually stops only to resume with a close-up shot of Don's expressionless face. Hughes notes in his film analysis on the closing scene of *Hostiles* that, "while the music is loud, the shot is diegetically silent [and] uses a smooth, unbroken long take" (Hughes, 2020: 89). In *Broken Flowers*, the opposite applies as the sound is quiet (whistling of the wind) while the shot is diegetically *loud* as the motion afforded by the shot entirely exposes Don's physical and

mental state.

Figure 4.2.9 – End scene: Motion and mentation through formalism

Pisters highlights the relationship between image and sound, explaining that "there is no law that makes images and sounds go naturally together. Nevertheless, […] the soundtrack has been constructed largely in function of realistic representation and the predominant mirroring of sound to vision: what we see is what we hear" (Pisters, 2014: 119). The arc shot therefore provides auditory meaning to the audience and suggests a racing of the mind. The use of diegetic sound also emphasises Don's inactivity in his lack of movement. The tone in the scene thus signifies that Don is experiencing an existential crisis, indicating to the audience, that although Don's journey has been unfruitful, he has achieved a new awakening in his life, although there are no suggestions made of an intent to make any meaningful changes to it. Much like music and tone in film, the elements of style and theme also offer insights as to how film techniques are adopted in indie films.

4.5. Stylistic and Thematic Elements in Indie Films

Julian Hanich in *Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* proposes that in order to achieve ultimate pleasure in the viewing experience of horror films, we must "think of aesthetic experience more narrowly defined—for instance, the pleasure of cognitive and emotional self-expansion, imaginary role-play and self-fashioning" (Hanich, 2010: 52). Thomas Sipos (*Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear*) notes that horror films utilise "acting, makeup, costuming, set décor, framing, photography, lighting, editing, and sound" (2010:1) in order to invoke emotions such as fear though such formal devices on screen. In discussing 'quality independent films' in Chapter 4.2.1, the thesis noted that *formal innovations* are often utilised in independent films in order to create alternative approaches to genre conventions. This chapter will showcase how indie films utilise stylistic and thematic elements in genre films in order to subvert traditional genre conventions. The

artistic use of components in film can either activate a scene or amplify an already active space to ensure the audience is able to create meaning through narrative as well as experience the emotions that are invoked by the film's central idea. This approach is masterfully replicated in Ari Aster's 2019 film, *Midsommar*, which will be the focus of how theme and style are manifested in indie films.

Sipos highlights the emotive qualities of horror films and argues that as a genre, horror films are:

> […] difficult to peg because it's an emotive genre, a terrifying blob that absorbs new story conventions from every historical/societal shift. Horror always finds a new scary mask to resonate current concerns, finding the dark side to every wish, whether in outer space or in suburbia. (Sipos, 2010: 6)

Aaron Smuts writing on the cognitive and philosophical approaches to horror film posits that the fear invoked by horror films is "not a philosophical problem [...] [but] an empirical question best answered by film scholars and psychologists" (Smuts, in Benshoff, 2017: 11). The purpose of the exploration of style and theme in *Midsommar* however, is not to determine why the audience experiences certain emotions but to examine how such emotive provisions (such as surprise, fear and disgust) are elicited through the *smart* use of formal devices within a conventional system. This is because Smuts' proposition encroaches into audience reception studies which is beyond the scope of this thesis. The aim is to examine the filmic elements adopted in the film and determine how it underscores conventions of the genre.

In his discussion in smart cinema, Sconce argues that the quality of "blank style" is often central to films that qualify as such, but clarifies that:

> Blankness […] does not refer to 'invisibility' (as frequently discussed in relation to classical Hollywood editing) but can be described as an attempt to convey a film's story, no matter how sensationalistic, disturbing or bizarre, with a sense of dampened affect. Of course, there is no such thing as truly blank style or narration - only a set of strategies employed to signify the idea of blankness. (Sconce, 2002: 359)

Sconce suggests that blank style films reject traditional storytelling conventions and offer a unique approach to cinematic expression by utilising stylistic and narrative techniques to convey themes such as nihilism and existential angst. *Blankness* therefore serves as a useful way of understanding how stylistic and thematic elements are used in indie films. In the exploration and analysis of *Midsommar*, the thesis will highlight the stylistic devices and techniques used to exemplify *blankness* thereby intentionally subverting audience expectations while inviting the audience to become emotionally immersed in storytelling while also questioning the meaning of the film narrative.

4.5.1. *Midsommar* (2019)

The film follows the life of Dani, who, after losing her sister and parents to an apparent murder-suicide, embarks on a summer trip to Sweden with her boyfriend Christian, and his friends, Josh, Mark and Pelle. What seems like a normal summer trip soon descents into horror through a series of disturbing rituals and cultural practices that tests the selfhood of Dani and her friends as well as her already strenuous relationship with Christian. The film's opening is rather theatrical (mimicking the opening of theatre curtains) with sunny/bright tapestry pictures which opens into a bleak picture of snow, accompanied by solemn folk music. The theatrical opening is a mural representing a journey from darkness plagued with death and grief to an eternal paradise through a crossing into enlightenment. True to the mural's representation, the film begins with montages of dark, snow-covered trees in the forest and snowy landscapes of a town. The calm music and bleak visuals are abruptly interrupted with the sound of a phone ringing in Dani's parents' home.

Figure 4.3.1 – Visual style: Opening scene

From the moment in which the group of friends set out on their summer holiday to Sweden, the film is shot almost entirely in daylight. Noël Carroll suggests in *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart* that horror films typically utilise dark lighting in order to invoke fear in the audience (Carroll, 2003). *Midsommar* is presented in deep contrast to this convention and utilises brightness in most of its shots. The bright lighting and over-saturated colours usually invoke feelings of joy, happiness and familiarity. In the film however, these elements are used to invoke discomfort in the audience. The lighting becomes overpowering in several instances in its unnaturalness and allows the audience to build on an affective state of discomfort about film space through such components. The use of colour and lighting also disorients the audience in an ironic way (because it provokes the audience to question the reason for its utilisation thereby eliciting fear and confusion rather than happiness).

Midsommar adopts dark lighting in the scenes before the group leaves for the trip, implying to the audience that the issues that exist amongst the friends, particularly surrounding

Dani and Christian's relationship, are kept in secret and are not fully discussed. The group's disposition around Dani is the complete opposite of their explicit opinions about her in her absence. Dani too, conceals her emotions after the death of her family and insists to her friends that she is okay. In one scene however, she runs into the bathroom and cries after Pelle extends his condolences to her. This again, signals to the audience that Dani does not feel free to express her emotions to her friends. Christian too, faces a similar problem as he initially plans on ending his relationship with Dani but hesitates after the loss of her family. Hence, before their trip to Sweden, the events are dull, (emphasised by the dull lighting), problems are left unresolved, and feelings and opinions are left unexpressed. The trip to the commune then brings everything to light, both figuratively (certain truths are revealed to and about the friends) and literally (through the use of warm lighting).

Kris Malkiewicz explores lighting and mood in *Film Lighting Talks with Hollywood's Cinematographers and Gaffers*. He suggests that the creation of "varying degrees of softness and directionality" is an important method used by filmmakers "to create mood through lighting" (Malkiewicz, 2012: 116). That is, the film component, depending on its utilisation, offers the possibility of different effects and moods. In its conventional use, bright lighting with warm tones is often used to elicit sentiments that include comfort, hope and happiness. The expectation is therefore built in the audience that whatever stagnations that exist in the characters' lives is about to change. Plantinga argues that "the psychological unconscious is generally directed toward personal wellbeing (or adaptation if you will) and is driven by motives beyond [...] desires for achievement, power, affiliation, and intimacy" (Plantinga, 2009: 51). He explains that "the psychological unconscious [...] is modular and fragmented" so although "much of our behaviours and many of our responses to our environment are beyond conscious control" (Plantinga, 2009: 51), there is a level of absent conscious deliberation with which we exercise unconscious activity (such as breathing) when faced with environmental factors that are in sharp contrast to our perceived emotional state or mood (such as a sudden loud noise). Consequently, although the mood cues provided by the film at the point in which the component of bright lighting is utilised seeks to instil in the audience a sense of calm and nostalgia, the perceived emotional state is soon disrupted when the lighting is sustained and unaffected by the ever-changing events in the action space.

As mentioned previously, the trip to the commune brings everything to light. The villagers in the commune are seen crying together and laughing together. Dani also shares this experience with the villagers when they cry with her upon discovering Christian with one of the village maidens. Underlying issues are therefore exposed in the film and brought to the surface in the way that contrasts with the time before their journey. Irony is again suggested

through form to invoke emotion: On the one hand, intentions are made visible through lighting which provides a level of comfort. On the other hand, the persistence of bright lighting and oversaturated colours serve to distract the audience from the unsettling practices that cloak the community. By making gruesome events take place in the light (a component that often signifies cosiness and happiness), the audience's *psychological unconscious* then assumes a level of modularity that creates an opening for the questioning of the morality of the villagers, and if they are indeed just as heinous as their cultural practices would suggest.

True to the film's opening tapestry, the characters are seen entering through the sun portal and into the commune. Before the friends leave for the commune, Pelle explains aspects of the festival to Dani:

Pelle: Lots of pageantry, special ceremonies and dressing up.
Dani: That sounds fun.
Pelle: It would probably seem very silly but it's like theatre.

As the friends travel through the yellow flower path, they enter the commune through the back of the portal, which indicates to the audience that the characters are not mere spectators of the theatrical performance, but they are the act (the entertainment for the Harga cult). The film also features several paintings, drawing and event sequences in a manner that is similar to theatre. There are costumes, dancing and singing which are also featured in theatrical performances. Character performance seemingly then becomes a re-enactment of the subconscious of the characters and is presented artistically and in a way that showcases formal elements against normal cinematic conventions.

Figure 4.3.2 – Sun motif to emphasise thematic elements

There are elements of blankness in *Midsommar* that emphasises the "dampened affect" discussed by Sconce (2002: 359). Indeed, even as *disturbing,* and *bizarre* as the events and images of the film are, a sense of dampened affect is still conveyed in several moments in the film. Firstly, with the persistent brightness in visual style, the film utilises facial feedback from Dani to remind the audience that she is clouded by emptiness from psychological trauma.

Secondly, the moments in which we are presented with dark lighting during the group trip, is offered through Dani's point of view, and in a space that only she occupies. For example, when she takes psychedelic drugs with her friends upon arrival in Sweden, Dani panics and goes in a nearby restroom which is dimly lit, and she hallucinates about her dead sister before running back out into the brightly lit outdoors.

In another instance, when the group has experienced the death of two village elders, Dani has a haunting dream the same night in which her friends all drive away and leave her behind. The audience is presented with visuals of black smoke emanating from Dani's mouth as she screams inaudibly, and her screams are cut against montages of her dead sister, her dead parents, and the dead villagers. The visual representation is paired with a sound design that builds tension though a ghostly, dark, string-swelling soundtrack. It accompanies the visuals of the dead who are now presented in the rock mountains in which the old villagers plunged to their death. The modulated use of formal elements in an artistic pattern implies that Dani's fears about her future are far from over. It signifies the presence of grief for the dead, but the pairing of imagery in a way that positions her dead family in the rock mountains in the commune indicates that Dani has brought her grief on the trip while also suggesting that there is an active attempt by Dani to deal with grief through psychological bargaining: By visually positioning her parents in the mountains to die a 'Harga' death, it suggests that Dani is reimagining a death in which her family has a choice (much like the old villagers) in how they die. The use of dark colours and lighting therefore offers a *blankness* to convey implied meanings of events within the story, in the same way that the contrasting formulation of brightness offers discomfort.

When Dani sits at the midsummer feast after she is crowned May Queen, the flowers draped on her chair corresponds with her breathing to signify that she has become one with nature and with the Harga people. The theme of nature is represented throughout the film and climaxes when Dani is adorned with a flower garb. When Dani is on psychedelic drugs in the moments before they reach the commune, she hallucinates the growing of grass from her hand; and when she dances with the villagers, she also hallucinates the growth of grass from her feet. The repetitive use of nature in the moments when Dani is in a hallucinogenic state therefore foreshadows Dani's eventual indoctrination into the Harga. The editing style and camera movement during Dani's psychedelic experience indicates hypersensitivity through visual imagery (movement of trees) and sound (whistling of trees). The audience is invited to partake in Dani's experience as it reveals her mental state and visual impairment. Such use of formal elements invokes emotions by mimicking the effects of psychedelic drugs and how the experience is shaped through an interaction with external stimuli.

Figure 4.3.3 – Nature motif to emphasise thematic elements

The film utilises metafiction by breaking the fourth wall to invoke emotion in the audience. Tom Brown (*Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema*) explores this film approach. He notes that the moments in which the film directly addresses the audience crucially helps to "intensify our relationship with the fiction" as opposed to the assumption by many scholars that when characters acknowledge the audience or spectator, it "destroys the illusion of the story world" and "distances us from the fiction" (Brown, 2012: x). In one scene in which the old villagers plunge to their death in the mountains, a young villager looks directly at the audience for—a brief moment—shortly before the plunge. There is a feeling of hopelessness and guilt invoked in the audience as there is nothing that can be done to stop the events from happening. In his analysis of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* [1997/2007] (a film also cited by Brinkema in Chapter 2.3.3).

Brown makes several observations on the *direct address* technique in the film that equally applies to the scene that also adopts this technique in *Midsommar*. Thus, "the duration of the shot overdetermines the camera's [and the audience's] gaze" (Brown, 2012: 29). The gaze from the young villager also becomes "disconcerting" due to its unexpectedness. Furthermore, "while [the audience's] gaze is overdetermined and [they] search through the image for meaning, attention is called to [their] lack of control. [...] [The audience's] voyeuristic satisfaction is denied, then teasingly satisfied, but to the point where [they] are made to feel [like] obtrusive observers" (ibid.). In other words, the use of metafiction transports the audience into the movie space and renders them a part of the ritual in a way that they become mere spectators to an event they cannot change or influence. The visceral emotion of helplessness and angst is further amplified when Dani and her friends are shown to feel similarly helpless. This is achieved through high angle camera shots as they stare up at the mountains in anticipation of what is about to unfold. There is therefore no means through which

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the audience can relinquish the burden of association from the event, or the characters Dani and her friends are also looking up to the mountain and also witnessing the event.

Figure 4.3.4 – Foreshadowing through metafiction

Midsommar also utilises symbolisms throughout the film. Towards the end of the film, the attire that each character is adorned in is indicative of their fate. As the attires suggest, Christian is covered in death (a bear's carcass) and Dani is draped in rebirth (colourful flowers). Ironically though, the flowers are cut which suggests that they will eventually wither and die. Hence, the audience gets the sense that Dani and Christian's fate are more aligned than not. Although Christian's death is happening in the present moment, and his death is gruesome, it is implied that Dani's death will be masked with beauty and joy through the flowers. Implicitly, the film may be revealing the true intentions of the Harga people, by revealing who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. Christian sits paralysed in the temple and is unable to move in his bear suit, signifying an end that he cannot escape from. Dani too, it is suggested, will die eventually (the Harga people reach the end of their life cycle at the age of seventy-two). The symbolism of the flowers though, implicitly suggests that Dani will die an honourable death with a chance of an afterlife, much like in the Harga ritual where life is deliberately ended for hopes of a continuation of new life. The final scene in which Dani smiles also alludes to the sun motif in the tapestry in the opening scene.

Figure 4.3.5 – A new beginning

Allegoric provisions are made in *Midsommar* in artistic ways, particularly in reference to *The Wizard of Oz*. The characters in the film assume the roles of the characters in *The Wizard of OZ*. Christian represents the lion (because he has no courage in expressing his thoughts and feelings). Mark seemingly represents the scarecrow (because he acts aloof and disrespects the sacred traditions of the Harga people. Additionally, in one scene, some children can be seen playing and Mark asks one of the villagers what they are doing to which the villager responds: "They are playing Skin the Fool". This serves as foreshadowing of Mark's fate as he is eventually killed by the villagers, skinned alive and adorned with was a Jester's hat before he is sacrificed and burnt). Scarecrow motifs are also present at different points in the movie to add to the film's allegoric connotations (see Fig. 4.3.6). Josh represents the tin man (because he is callous in the way he approaches the needs of others and only seemingly thinks about himself). *The Wizard of Oz* allegory is also emphasised though the motif of yellow flowers: As Dani and her friends journey through the forest to the commune, the path they follow to the village is filled with yellow flowers, much like the yellow brick road in *The Wizard of Oz.*

Figure 4.3.6 – Symbolism in Midsommar: Scarecrows

Figure 4.3.7 – Symbolism in Midsommar: the road of yellow flowers

In addition to the allegoric provisions in the film, the use of motifs and symbolisms presented throughout the film represents the pathologies of life. Mark is presented as a childish character who is never aware of his environment and seeks the simple hedonistic pleasures of

life (partying, sex and drugs). Josh is career focused and pursues his life's ambitions at the expense of forming true bonds with his friends of sympathising with them in their moment of need. The character of Christian is unable to form any emotional connections, either with his girlfriend or through his communications with his friends. It can be argued that the Harga people serve to rectify all of their flaws, through the character of Dani because the Hargas offer community in the way that her friends do not. However, because the community is also a cult with sinister traditions and cultures, the film offers a nihilistic viewpoint to the audience, that all human endeavours in modern society are futile.

The Harga appear seemingly pleasant, and the film's stylistic approach and composition would ordinarily align with these sentiments. However, because their disconcerting actions do not align with their jovial disposition, it invokes shock and discomfort throughout the film. There is therefore a high level of cognitive engagement with the story through "learned affect program activators" (Tomkins, 2008: 135, discussed in Chapter 4.2.3) as a means of understanding motivations and gaining knowledge while questioning preconceived values and beliefs. Through cognitive engagement therefore, the audience can deduce that the Harga people weaponize sense of belonging and empathy in the way that they cry with Dani when she is in pain. This action implies a level of manipulation that is obvious to the audience especially when the Harga people ensure that Dani breaks away from her co-dependent relationship with Christian, only to inculcate her into a new co-dependent relationship with the Hargas by exploiting her pain.

The audience is prompted to look past the brightness and warmness that is typically associated with comfort. Yet, the brightness feels oppressive in its persistence as it takes over the entire visual landscape for most of the film. Crucially, the mise-en-scène serves to exhaust the audience and break down the barriers that is typically put up by the audience in the viewing experience of horror movies. For example, a film that is shot in a dark cave with dark, practical light source is more likely to elicit fear in the audience than a film shot in the sunny meadows. The film form also allows the audience to experience, as mentioned in Chapter 4.3, "all sorts of active and reflective mental activities" (Plantinga, 2018: 123), in the way in which the audience is able to be transported, past their emotional state, into a cognitive state in the way that they are able to think critically in order to understand both implicit and explicit meanings of the film. *Midsommar* therefore serves as an instruction manual about how a film's mise-en-scène, through an adoption of modern techniques to the elements within the frame of a film— the colour and design—as well as acting, can not only highlight and represent the themes of the film, but also influence mood and elicit emotion in a manner that is unconventional to its normal utilisation in genre.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has offered insightful arguments on independent film aesthetics. It began with discussing independent film culture by looking at the industrial and economic history of both the independent and Hollywood sectors of filmmaking. It also explained the factors that led to the emergence of the 'independent label'. The chapter then moved on to discuss the aesthetic and emotional range in indie films. It explored the aesthetic and emotional qualities of independent films through film form. A close reading of selected films including the study of *Clerks* (1994), *Tape* (2001), *Return of the Secaucus 7* (1979), *Broken Flowers* (2005) and *Midsommar* (2019) were carried out. The cinematic sensibility of indie films is shown to adhere to Sconce's *shared elements* that cut across films within the *smart cinema* category. The reader will recall that in Chapter 4.3.1, it was mentioned that smart films convey "a shared set of stylistic, narrative and thematic elements deployed in differing configurations by individual films" which could be achieved through "blank style" or "incongruous narration" (Sconce, 2002: 358). Here, the term 'shared elements' simply refers to the stylistic, narrative, and thematic *elements* that smart films *share*.

The five films analysed in this chapter draw focus on their combination of formalism and realism. That is, while they each utilise techniques that emphasise content in order to drive the story in a meaningful way, such constructions also compel a level of consciousness to the aesthetic elements within the narrative. This is because the audience is often positioned as participants in the action space through camera movement and position, framing and lighting. This systemic approach then influences the way in which meaning, and emotion are elicited in the films. Since *the self* is involved in *the text* (Carroll, 1999: 23), the way the text is able to elicit emotion then relies on *affective programming* (Tomkins, 2008: 135), and such programmes are informed, affirmed, monitored and controlled through film form.

In *Clerks*, the audience is positioned behind the camera within the action space. This is realised through the application of realism and materialised in the camera shots, static camera and positioning in several scenes. Hence, it *feels* like the audience is part of the dialogue (and even *in control* of the progression of dialogue), since the film has utilised realist techniques that creates such an atmosphere for the audience, within the movie space (see Figs. 4.1.5 and 4.1.6). The judgements made through character identification thence comes from the audience's ability to study the screen characters from behind the camera and within the space said characters occupy. Therefore, while the contents within the frames are emphasised—by way of realist techniques—in the narrative, there is also a level of viewer consciousness of

such elements, evoked through the aesthetic choices adopted in the film (such as the use of black and white shots in the film's mise-en-scène as a stylistic approach, but that also conveys content). Again, this is primarily because the audience the film positions the audience as active viewers that *belong* in the action space.

In the case of *Tape*, the audience is less *in control* of dialogue as the character of Vince commands power of the screen space in the interrogation-style setup of the mise-en-scène. The camera angles, positions and the shot sizes (long, mid and closeup shots) continue to change (see Figs. 4.1.9, 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) as Vince interrogates Jon. There is therefore an absence of such provision, no room if you will, for the audience, in the action space. (Think of an interrogation room in the real world where a detective questions a suspect, and the only other person, or people, permitted in close proximity and/or within earshot of the dialogue taking place in the interrogation room are those behind the one-way glass, so that they are not seen by the other parties, but are still able to hear and participate/witness their interaction as observers/voyeurs.) The audience though, are still positioned as active viewers in the film—tasked with listening, observing (through body language) and making judgements of the screen action. The element of real-time in the film also contributes to positioning the audience as active viewers since there is an implied urgency to the inquiry of truth.

Since the audience is afforded *no room* within the physical space of the action, the *affectiveness* and malleability created by the tension built in the progression of dialogue, triggers the audience's *core/innate* (Plantinga, 2009: 205) emotional response. Felicity Colman, writing in *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition,* explains how such affect is manifested in this way by reiterating affect's nature. Thus,

> [A]ffection is the intensity of colour in a sunset on a dry and cold autumn evening [...]
> affect is that audible, visual, and tactile transformation produced in reaction to a certain
> situation, event or thing […] affect is an independent thing; sometimes described in terms
> of the expression of an emotion or physiological effect. (Colman, 2010: 11)

The "concern-based" construction and expression of the emotions through judgement (Plantinga, 2009: 203) thence ensure that the audience is put on the defensive (whether they are aware that they are in such an affective state or not). This is because, as explained in Chapter 4.2.3, such affective responses are formed from mechanisms in *the self* that are activated and channelled through the social, psychological, and ideological interests. Hence, the level at which the emotion of "sociomoral disgust" (ibid.) is heightened or diminished is dependent on the ability of film form—as the subject of the affect—to answer certain truths in the film.

Audience engagement, through the deployment of formalist and realist styles, is utilised in *Return of the Secaucus 7*, and in similar configuration as with *Clerks*. The non-moving camera in scenes that heavily feature dialogue, and that mostly employ mid shots, enables the audience to view the characters at *eye level*. Crucially, innovative techniques are applied in the

spatial arrangement of scenes through formalism so that the audience *feels* like they are in close proximity with the screen characters, and it is suggested without the use of closeup shots in such scenes. The objective view that the shots compel allows the audience to view the characters as equals, in their dynamic. There is no perception of individual motive from any of the characters, and hence, an experience of judgement from the audience. *Secaucus 7*, though, unlike *Clerks*, affords the audience an extra *closeness* in the action space, even in the scenes that deploy long shots. This is achieved through the expository component in dialogue, as highlighted in Chapter 4.3.1. Since the screen characters provide details through dialogue that are absent from the shots, the audience, as external, viewing bodies, are invited into the screen space. The audience is therefore programmed not merely as active viewers in the two-dimensional screen space, but as participants in dialogue within the three-dimensional visual space, who, through the unconscious direction of the screen characters, are able to acquire knowledge of things not captured on camera.

Formalism as already mentioned is highlighted throughout film analysis in this chapter. The importance of film form has been highlighted in this chapter as well as in previous chapters. Bordwell (2016) and Levy (2019) highlight the general principles that are at work in filmic constructions. These include function, similarity/repetition, difference/variation, development and finally, unity/disunity. These principles involve stylistic, narrative, and other filmic components whose relationships work in the film to provide emotional value. Film form, as Bordwell notes, embody dynamic sets of relations. Furthermore, "artists design their works—they give them form—so that we can have a structured experience. For this reason, form is of central importance in film" (Bordwell, 2016: 51). The films explored so far reveal a randomness in the utilisation of formal elements. However, this is not rooted in the meaning that is intended through its use. The randomness in signifiers is intentional at least to the extent that it provides a specific meaning or sets of meanings. For example, repetitive music in *Broken Flowers* is used to signify ironic detachment.

While an understanding of the vocabulary surrounding filmmaking is important in understanding film form, form is also not reducible to technique. Hence, "with a little background knowledge of conventions, the viewer's expectations of what comes next in a film can be guided by its formal elements—and sometimes confounded by them" (Kuhn and Westwell, 2020: 264). This then means that it is essential to think of form as the subject of affect (see Table 4.1), which provides an affective experience to the audience through their engagement with said form. The films explored so far arguably share the five elements of smart films proposed by Sconce, which include:

1) the cultivation of 'blank' style and incongruous narration; 2) a fascination with 'synchronicity' as a principle of narrative organization: 3) a related thematic interest in

random fate. 4) a focus on the white middle-class family as a crucible of miscommunication and emotional dysfunction; 5) a recurring interest in the politics of taste, consumerism and identity. (Sconce, 2002: 358)

Nihilism has been heavily featured in the films explored so far. The reader will recall that in Chapter 3.1, the thesis mentioned that philosophical interpretations through such concepts as nihilism, passivism and affirmation are valuable ways of engaging emotions in film texts. On Sconce's five elements of smart cinema though, he clarifies that they "do not necessarily appear in all of the films at the core of the irony/nihilism debates, but they do circulate with enough frequency to suggest widespread diffusion in smart cinema director" (Sconce, 2002: 358). The ideas surrounding both irony and nihilism can be explored through the films analysed in this chapter.

The "ontological contingent and fully compossible" (Lie, 2016: 44) world that passivism provides affords the opportunity to investigate nihilism through the concepts of passivism and affirmative power. Deleuze (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*) posits that "the supersensible world and higher values are reacted against, their existence is denied, they are refused all validity" (Deleuze, 2006: 140). Here, Deleuze is referring to the significance of *nil* in relation to nihilism. He explains that "'[i]n the word nihilism, nihil does not signify non-being but primarily a value of nil. Life takes on a value of nil insofar as it is denied and depreciated' (Deleuze: 2006: 139). In its filmic application, nihilism thence can be viewed in two ways: screen characters who invoke nihilism through their conscious declaration of the meaningless of life; and characters who simply find nothing of meaning and value in their existence. The nothingness that plagues their way of life then produces the *value of nil*. The first conception of nihilism therefore applies to the character of Dante in *Clerks* as well as Vince in *Tape.* In such an instance, "hope for a valued outcome evaporates" (ibid.). Dante approaches life based on respectability politics and displays passivity in his lack of motivation to better his life. Vince too, asserts a level of morality amongst others, even in his acceptance that he lives an irresponsible life. The character of Don from *Broken Flowers*, on the other hand, embodies the second conception of nihilism in the way that he simply is unable to connect to anything in a meaningful way and in the absence of a conscious declaration or insinuation of such.

As previously noted, the embodiment of nihilism can be explored through passivism and affirmative power. Passivity has been explored in varying capacities, as it relates to the films analysed so far. For one, the nihilism at play in some of the films can be characterised as unconscious passivity, because the characters are far removed from such connotations of nihilism and do not *actively* embody nihilism. Such provisions therefore are generated from film form: The characters simply exist in the space and time frequency that generates nihilism. This can be observed through *formalist inactivity* on screen, which can be interpreted as

representing the absurdities of life. Deleuze notes that "the universe has no purpose […] it has no end to hope for any more than it has causes to be known" (Deleuze, 2006: 25). Accordingly, the static mise-en-scène in *Tape* and *Return of the Secaucus 7* for example, (composed largely of still frames and mid-shots) symbolises still life within the action space, one that is perpetual and unchanging.

The other significant element (along with nihilism) that is observed in the analysis of these films is the use of irony, again, albeit in different capacities and constructions across all analysis. In *Broken Flowers* for example, Don's quest to revisit his past relationships in order to reconnect with his son undercuts the traditional notions of masculinity. The irony lies in the dysfunction that his character presents as Don is perceived as a chauvinist due to his past relationships with women. In *Midsommar*, the ironic distance created by the cinematographic style achieves a level of discomfort that the utilisation of such techniques would usually not permit. The way genre is used in both films is also important. *Midsommar* uses themes and style in a way that is unconventional to the horror genre. *Broken Flowers* contains formal elements that would lend itself to belonging to the road movie genre: the focus on travelling, driving and even on the type of car that is driven. Road movies, however, typically focus on screen character who goes through a 'rite of passage' in their journey to self-discovery. The character usually emerges having fulfilled a goal or accomplishment. In *Broken Flowers* however, Don's journey is futile, and there are heavy suggestions upon his return, that he has learned nothing from the experience, both on a moral level and in his search for truth.

The concept of cinematic immersion was discussed in Chapter 4.3 in which Plantinga notes that the audience is able to "anticipate future events, test hypotheses about what might happen, make sense of sometimes complicated fictional worlds, fill in gaps in the narrative, and engage in moral judgments of the characters" (Plantinga, 2018: 123) is echoed in the exploration of the films in this chapter. When analysing the aesthetic, storytelling, music and tone, as well as the stylistic and thematic elements in indie films, the thesis has called attention to the hybridity that is created through their engagement in film, along with an observation of narrative organisation, and cognitive, emotive, psychological and philosophical frameworks within such films. There has been a recognition of the ability of the audience to engage with the film space to the extent that they are able to assume an active role within the movie space with such films that, quite radically, make *nothing* happen on screen through their application of static mise-en-scène. Having explored the above elements in independent films and how they provide emotional range and meaning, the thesis will, in later chapters, showcase how elements (such as theme, style and dialogue) and concepts can be applied to other films in this thesis, such as *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989), *John Q.* (2002) and *Black Swan* (2010). Before

such explorations, however, the thesis will examine the ways in which representation in indie films can be examined and how this might lead to a better understanding of cinema identity.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCEPTS OF REPRESENTATION IN INDEPENDENT CINEMA|

It has been echoed throughout this thesis that by broadening the understanding of film identity and representation (through an exploration of theoretical concepts, and in relation to their underlying systems of production) that the thesis, in so doing, provides conceptions through which we can understand cinema identity. Such concepts, as also noted, show how an engagement with psychology, sociology and philosophy can serve crucial roles in how film practices are identified, understood, and valued. In the introductory portion of the thesis, the thesis posed a question regarding how emotion and affect in film might reach a threshold for what can be considered an accurate method of exploring film representation in systems of film production. This portion of the thesis will examine how representation is reflected in independent cinema through film analysis but also through philosophical notions such as realism and illusion. The reader will recall that the start of the thesis identified the concepts of ideology and representation as being useful ways through which we can understand emotional engagement with film.

In the review of Hollywood Cinema in Chapter 2.2, the thesis noted that its institutions embody several aspects including identities relating to culture and race; and representation that includes gender and sexuality. Representation was also captured in Chapter 2.2.2 where the thesis noted the different forms of representation that exists within any specific cinema. In Hollywood, the representation of blackness that was successfully achieved amongst the black viewing audience in America during the New Hollywood Era (in the period between 1967 and 1982), was not commercially driven, although "they were also dominated by Hollywood's influence on black audiences" (Lott, 1998: 212). The chapter also pointed out that the New Hollywood Era was later followed by a shift in the representation of blackness by way of the blaxploitation era which involved the "resistance and co-optation dominated by black action films employing strategic reversals of mainstream ideology" (ibid.). The independent movement under the Hollywood structure, therefore, was specifically a movement that emphasised an independence of representation through matters relating specifically to race, class struggle and sexual stereotypes.

Continuing from the discussions in the last chapter on *smart* cinema, this chapter will continue to highlight Sconce's five elements, with regards to representation in independent cinema. It will especially showcase the fifth element which posits that smart cinema has "a recurring interest in the politics of taste, consumerism and identity" (Sconce, 2002: 358). Benjamin Fraser (*Cultures of Representation: Disability in World Cinema Contexts*) notes that

films that feature "racial, queer, female, cognitive, sensory, psychiatrically and physically disabled people" (Fraser, 2021: 19) are often tasked with "understand[ing] serious social dangers and attempt to imagine more habitable worlds" (Fraser, 2021: 20) for the members of such groups. The realist and formalist techniques employed in presenting these issues are therefore crucial to the audience's understanding of their context.

This chapter also seeks to explore the implication of the provision of the emotional qualities evoked through films on cinema representation, and consequently, how said quality-based identities could serve as a way of distinguishing between systems of film production. It is worth looking at the way in which audiences shape cinema representation. Hence, looking into the geographical facets of cinema is significant. In Chapter 2.3.1 the thesis touched on Laura Marks' "haptic visuality" in which she discusses the "way vision […] can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes" (Marks, 2000: xi). The approach was used to highlight how "knowledge and memory" are reflected in "experimental and mainstream cinema" (Marks, 2000: xiii). Marks suggested that the different audiences that exist within both intercultural and Western cinemas are offered different provisions in film.

The chapter suggested that Marks assigns a hierarchy on cinema which is based on the level of residual/inherent use of knowledge (feelings) afforded by the cinema. Hence, on a cognitive level, 'intercultural cinema' is placed above 'western cinema' because the western cinema relies on "supplement" knowledge and memory in an array of resources at its disposal. As Marks explains, intercultural cinema "appeals to embodied knowledge and memory in the absence of other resources" (Marks, 2000: xiii). Marks' arguments are therefore informed by "theories of embodied spectatorship" which are further informed by "phenomenology and feminist criticism" (ibid.). Andreas Jacobsson, writing in *Journal of Intercultural Studies* explains that "at the heart of thinking on intercultural film is the notion that when people move, ideas and aesthetics move as well, therefore the effect of this movement is a constant change" (Jacobsson, 2017: 59). It then becomes increasingly important to examine the "form of art cinema" (ibid.) that circulates outside of the regular distribution networks.

The motivation for Jacobsson's proposal perhaps relates to Marks' questions of *embodied knowledge and memory*. Additionally, if the dominant cinema within any culture produces a set of sociocultural forms in its filmmaking practices, then it is not an overstatement to conclude that the emotional and affective provisions of such films offer a different quality that is yet as to be seen in other cultural contexts. In this regard therefore, it is important to examine the representations of an identity-based cinema and of film content offered in independent cinema. Textual reading of the case study films in this chapter also shows how emotion and affect are produced, understood, and valued within film that factors in

representations relating to social issues and subject matter. Having summarised the notions of interpretation that exists in cinema thus far, the thesis now moves to discuss the concepts of illusion and realism and how these are represented in cinema.

5.1. Illusion and Realism

> Cinema is the ultimate pervert art. It doesn't give you what you desire - it tells you how to desire. (Slavoj Žižek)
> The moment we cry in a film is not when things are sad but when they turn out to be more beautiful than we expected them to be. (Alain de Botton)

The above quote from Slovene philosopher, Slavoj Žižek is perhaps, a response to the syndrome of consumerism. There is a perceived lack of satisfaction if *reward* does not happen immediately. The second quote from Swiss-British philosopher, Alain de Botton describes film as having the power and ability to portray stories in the most persuasive, impactful and wonderful way to the audience. Like Alain de Batton, it is commonly stated by many scholars that audience experience of moving images involves a perceptual illusion so that this perception defines the very nature of cinema itself as an art form.

Francis Sparshott explains this view by positing that, "film seems to be unlike any older art in the way it depends on illusion. […] [Y]ou can only explain what a film is by saying how it works, and how it works is by creating an illusion" (Sparshott, 2006: 82). He expands further on the concept of illusion by suggesting a sample definition:

> A film is a series of images projected on a screen so fast that anyone watching the screen is given the impression of continuous motion; such images being projected by a light shining through a corresponding series of images arranged on a continuous band of flexible material'. (Sparshott, 2006: 82)

Noteworthy is the fact that the *sample definition* offered by Sparshott is suggested with a specific kind of technology in mind. The medium and mechanisms with which art is presented will ultimately influence the illusion proffered.

David Bordwell too makes a similar argument to Sparshott, arguing that the medium of cinema is itself, an illusion. As he explains:

> Although the mechanics still aren't well understood, movies play upon faults in our visual system. A series of static images, flicked past our eyes rapidly with intervals of darkness in between, can provoke us to see a stable scene displaying movement. Without any training in psychology, Méliès understood that if he controlled what people saw from one film frame to another, he could create fantasy effects. So he paused the camera, rearranged his actors, and then restarted the camera. On screen, the actors seemed magically to disappear, reappear, or turn into demons or monsters. (Bordwell, 2013: 30)

Bordwell credits Georges Méliès as being one of the "most famous of the early filmmakers" to exploit "cinema's capacities for optical illusions" (Bordwell, 2013: 30).

This idea of illusionism in cinema is also explored by other scholars including Gregory Currie, Erwin Panofsky, Béla Balázs and Paul Weiss. Currie explores the notion of cognitive illusions in film in his book *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science*. He posits that "film watching in some systematic way, and as part of the normal process of the viewer's engagement, causes the viewer to have the false belief that the fictional characters and events represented are real" (Currie, 1995: 22). Panofsky, also, talks about film illusion and the role the camera plays in the viewer's act of identification. He notes that, "aesthetically [the audience] is in permanent motion as his eye identifies itself with the lens of the camera" (Panofsky, 2004: 218). Balázs suggests that "in the cinema, the camera carries the spectator into the film picture itself. We see everything from the inside as it were and are surrounded by the characters of the film" (Balázs, 1972: 48). Here, he describes how the combination of formal devices such as the close-up shot, cross-cutting and the character's face help achieve this experience. This view is buttressed by Noël Carroll in the discussion of emotion. As he explains, the combination of the human face and point-of-view editing, serves to heighten the viewing experience through the use of the "point/glance shot" and the "point/object shot" (Carroll, 1996: 132).

MacCabe explores the 'contradiction and the real' in *Screen*. In addressing the issues surrounding realism in film, he posits that:

> Film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather that film is constituted by a set of discourses which (in the positions allowed to subject and object) produce a certain reality. The emphasis on production must be accompanied by one on another crucial Marxist term, that of contradiction. (MacCabe, 1976: 11)

He emphasises that in analysing film, there is no objective standard through which the subject of reality can be addressed. Arguably, perception is reality; hence, in film analysis, "dealing with a set of contradictory discourses [is] transformed by specific practices. Within a film text these may be different 'views' of reality which are articulated together in different ways" (MacCabe, 1976: 11). In his examination of the principles of pleasure, he adds that the dominant principle that imbues all types of cinemas is realism. Similar to MacCabe's concerns surrounding realism in film, Gabriel Giralt writes in *Journal of Film and Video* that there are two major claims surrounding the expression of reality in cinema. On the one hand, there is the suggestion that "reality precedes artistic knowledge and is fully independent of it" (Giralt, 2010: 5). The other claim proposes the opposite view, "that artistic knowledge defines reality (i.e., reality is what one makes of it)" (ibid.). Giralt suggests however that both approaches are reliant on a subjective interpretation of reality itself.

Bordwell also touches on the idea of perception and cognition in film analysis and notes these concepts show that "'illusion' is not simply a matter of fooling the eye. The spectator participates in creating the illusion" (Bordwell, 2019: 7). He further notes that, "if perceptual

illusion requires some spectatorial activity, even more is required for that imaginative involvement solicited by narrative" (ibid.). Here, Bordwell suggests that film form must be taken into account by the audience in order to produce a comprehensive pattern of understanding, because individual film structures are bound by a system of codes.

Bordwell's argument is echoed by Noël Burch in his exploration into form and meaning in cinema. He argues that in narration, "the stages of formation and the on-going elaboration of the basic mode of representation in the cinema of the West point to an all but universal tendency within the dominant cinema […] to *maximise* and *generalise* the diegetic effect" (Burch, 1979: 19). As the thesis continues to discuss representation in independent films both through an identity-based cinematic representation—through aesthetic qualities within film— and socio-political representations within the cinema, it will continue to utilise film form as a means of examining realism and illusionism in film. The thesis will now analyse *Go Fish* (1994, Rose Troche) as well as *Poison* (1991, Todd Haynes) to showcase how representation is reflected in both films.

5.1.1. Social and Cultural Representation in *Go Fish* (1994)

Rose Troche's film *Go Fish* (1994) explores the lives of a group of lesbians in Chicago. It centres around the love story between the characters Max and Ely. While the film adopts a conventional approach in its romantic premise, the film uses experimental techniques to explore the lives of lesbians in contemporary society. The film is shot in black and white and offers a first-person narrative in Max which allows for the other characters to be quickly established in the story. The progression of the narrative emphasises themes of love, sex, and dating. Max's evolution from living in a state of fantasy, to contemplation and finally a development of a new perspective on life are all captured through her interaction with other characters.

The film is heavily reliant on dialogue and utilises this method as commentary on the sociocultural world of the film. Through Max's point of view, the story begins as a fantasy, evolves into a dilemma and ends with a new perspective. This format replaces the standard narrative structure of an equilibrium, a disequilibrium and a new equilibrium. At the start of the film, Max fantasises about meeting her ideal woman. Her desire for love is made evident in her words:

> I think I saw her on the subway yesterday. I saw her and I thought we were supposed to meet yesterday on the bus. She was supposed to sit down next to me, spill her soda on me, we were supposed to laugh, make a game of cleaning it up where we touch each other more than necessary.

The film's use of dialogue in a very casual manner also embodies attributes of observational documentary style because the audience is provided a permissive, unsensational, and inactive space through which they can engage in the characters' lives and observe the dynamics that exists between them.

Halfway through the film, Max ponders on her life as a lesbian. The audience is able to identify with Max through her confessions of personal struggle:

> What if one day the feeling of having a dirty secret overwhelms me? […] What if I black out and I wake up alone mid-day in a house and I've been napping, and I find out that I'm married to a man?

At the end of the film, Max has acquired a new perspective on her life having experienced love. As if answering the own questions from earlier in the film, and cautioning herself for the future, Max states:

> Don't fear too many things, it's dangerous. Don't say so much, you ruin everything. Don't worry yourself into a corner, and don't just think about it so much. The girl you're gonna meet doesn't look like anyone you know, and when you meet her, your toes might tingle. It's hard to say. Don't box yourself in, don't leave yourself wide open. Don't think about it every second, but just don't let yourself forget. The girl is out there.

With storytelling done through Max's recollection of life events, Max achieves self-actualisation through finding love in Ely.

In one scene, Max and Ely go to the cinema and upon their return, they discuss the film they have just seen.

> Max: Why do queers always have to be so pathetic? I mean, I'm queer and I'm finding it real' easy to hate myself. The man is a gay filmmaker. I feel like there's a certain responsibility to represent us in a certain way.
> Ely: I don't know, I really liked the film. There were so many beautiful things about it. We expect queer filmmakers to take on the responsibility to represent the entire community. I think that's a lot to ask anyway.
> Max: I know, but I don't just feel we can withstand the negative representation from within our own ranks.

Through dialogue, Go Fish exposes issues of representation in film itself. By laying bare some of its own themes of deconstructing lesbian identity, and navigating through a heteronormative society, the film utilises dialogue to expose certain truths about the society at large.

Indeed, Max's worry about the importance of representation transcends the film she is discussing and reflects social concerns in the real world. Their conversation is also reflected in the lives of their friends. Daria (Ely's roommate and friend) sleeps with a man and is confronted by a group of lesbians who disapprove of her choices and insist that she is not a "real lesbian". Their judgement serves to highlight some of the opinions within the lesbian community. The group asserts themselves as wanting to preserve a particular image of the community by approaching sexuality as rigid in order to maintain a coherent identity in a heteronormative society. Daria disagrees however and expresses that "if a gay man has sex with a woman, he was bored, drunk, lonely, whatever and if a lesbian has sex with a man, her whole life becomes

suspect". Daria exposes the double standards that exists even within the gay community. The group, however, insist on their assertions and one of them responds to Daria: "My definition of a lesbian does not involve men in any way. How are we supposed to establish some kind of identity if lesbians are going around having sex with men?" As far as Daria's critics are concerned, she has misrepresented the lesbian community with her actions. For Daria however, sex with a man should not invalidate her lesbian identity, and the physicality of sex should be separated from her lived experience with women.

Go Fish employs experimental/minimalistic techniques—perhaps less in its narrative form and more in its departure from stylistic conventions. The film elicits interest through visual style, performance, dialogue, and sound to provide meaning to the audience (similar to *Clerk*'s use of textual cues). For example, prior to Ely getting a haircut, a scene features a series of grim shots with hand movements (that connote hesitation and contemplation) after a character whispers the word "change". This is then followed by a scene in which Ely contemplates getting a haircut. Her decision to go through with it then ushers in a new *change*, through her physical appearance but also speaks to her new identity as a butch lesbian. The visual style therefore successfully highlights the emotional state of the characters.

Vineet Kaul (*Madhya Pradesh Journal of Social Sciences*) in exploring representation in film posits that the filmmaker that highlights social issues must "recreate and reconstruct the reality of the society […] and depict certain social realities in a manner that would leave the audience with a sense of aesthetic enlightenment" (Kaul, 2014: 139). Similarly, *Go Fish* uses social realism in its narrative by introducing the audience to characters in a practical way. The unsensational and casual manner in which dialogue ensues and characters are introduced—as well as the strategic use of formal components in the film—serves to emphasise content and allows for the audience to focus on the themes in the film. It also grounds the screen characters outside of the movie space and in the real world. There is heavy use of diegetic sound in the film; non-diegetic sound, like music is only used when the characters are going on about their daily lives in a way that memorialises the friendship amongst the women.

In Chapter 4.2.1, the thesis highlighted quirky sensibilities as one of the tenets of *quality* films. Quirky approaches are adopted in *Go Fish* with its "approach to comedy, a visual style that courts a fastidious 'artificiality' […] [and] a tone which balances ironic detachment with sincere engagement" (MacDowell. 2013: 54). There are several moments in the film in which dead-pan humour is elicited, which signifies the interest that the screen characters have in having casual conversations that affirm their life experience, identity or that questions societal norms. In two separate moments in the film, Kai, Daria and two of their friends *put heads together*—literally and figuratively— in order to consult with one another.

Figure 5.1.1 – Spatial organisation with angle shot

As the women are lying down, they contemplate life and love. The spatial arrangement of the frame, along with the angle of the camera shot used in the scene, draws attention to dialogue. The women discuss the relationship between Max and Ely, and other topics like the *Lesbian Bed Death*. In another scene, Max and Ely each separately describe to Kai and Daria respectively the details of their night together with specific details about nail-clipping as a prelude to seduction. It is revealed through exposition in dialogues and reference cues that *Go Fish* caters to a lesbian audience. The film features characters that are lesbians and their societal concerns as well as concerns within their own community are told and understood from their point of view. The film therefore provides aesthetic enlightenment through a *sincere engagement* with the screen characters and their life experiences through its formal approach. The film's conscious framing of the story through realism succeeds in producing the representation of a social issue relating to sexual orientation and exposing sexuality as multifaceted and liberating within the cultural context of American society.

5.1.2. Artistic Representation in *Poison* (1991)

> The whole world is dying of panicky fright. [Prologue]
>
> A man must dream a long time in order to act with grandeur, and dreaming is nursed in darkness. -Jean Genet. [Epilogue]

The foreboding quote in the start of Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991) carries over to the three stories that emerge in interwoven narratives, all of them presumably inspired by the novels of Jean Genet. The first story "Hero" is a fictional documentary about Richie Beacon, a seven-year-old boy. In the year 1985, Richie shoots his father and then *disappears* by *flying out an open window* and was never seen again. The second story "Horror" is inspired by the mad-

scientist/ psychotropic horror genre in which a thirty-two-year-old scientist, Dr Thomas Graves, discovers the "hormonal equivalent of the sexual instinct". Graves accidentally ingests his sample and contracts leprosy that deforms him. The third story "Homo" is about forty-four-year-old prisoner, John Broom. John falls in love with fellow inmate, Jack Bolton, whom he first met as a youth while at a juvenile facility.

The film adopts a variety of stylistic approaches in order to provide emotional engagement with the story and its characters. Amy Taubin (*American Independent Cinema*) provides an accurate summary of this, suggesting that *Poison* is about "deviance" which is "encoded in its structure" (Taubin, 2001: 77). She adds that the film's stories are "interwoven, but without any apparent overlap or connection between them. Each has a visual style and a clear narrative of its own, and each takes place in its own separate fictional world" (ibid.). All the stories revolve around shame, sex and violence and it is implied that ignorance and fear breed destruction.

Hillier, commenting on *Poison* notes that the film is "about deviance, with deviance encoded in its structure" (Hillier, 2001: 77). He adds that:

> The film's construction tends to encourage a reading of the three narratives as being separate, and it is only towards the end that a faster cutting speed between them encourages a stronger sense of parallelism. But the film fosters this sense of separateness in order to maintain a *suspended* possibility of comparison between the three. The narratives are only conflated at the beginning and the end, and the initial links are far from self-evident. (Hillier, 2001: 78)

In "Hero" the film focuses on domestic violence, which is a topic of great "panicky fright". Richie Beacon's suffering and eventual vengeance on his father Fred, is linked to his mother's infidelity: the young boy had walked in on his mother Felicia having sex with the gardener. He later finds his father physically abusing his mother due to her adultery and he takes a gun and kills his father. According to his mother's account of the event, Richie goes to an open window afterwards and "flies away". The hyperrealism in dialogue is further amplified with Haynes' stylistic approach. Most of "Hero" is shot in documentary-style format. In the 'teletabloids' sequence for example, the identity of witnesses is revealed through on-screen titles and voiceover narration. The narrative, however, violates this perspective by reverting to fictional style of storytelling through flashbacks to events in Richie's life. In one scene for example, Richie has a vision of his mother in bed with the gardener and there is a shift from objective *viewpointing* (brought on my simply observing) to the subjective *viewpointing* (though manipulated form).

"Horror" offers a more coherent presentation and narration. It is shot entirely in black and white, and the formalist style of low camera angles and high contrast lighting (similar to classic horror movies) are utilised in the story. The character of Dr Graves creates panic and hysteria after his disease which leads to him being chased through the streets by an

unsympathetic mob and policemen. Graves, overwhelmed by his treatment in his community, eventually jumps off a building. The fall does not kill him immediately and he is taken to a hospital where he has a vision of an angel (an old man) descending to him as he dies. "Homo" uses another collection of stylistic approaches in its storytelling. Most of the narrative utilises realism in its composition (in the dark corridors and courtyards of the prison. The story, however, through flashbacks, reveals to the audience a boys' school where John and Jack first encounter each other. The flashbacks utilise formalist techniques in the colour, design, and costumes in its scenes by adopting oversaturated (pink) colour composition and ornamental trees which elicits a dream-like state. The events in these flashbacks however are in brutal contrast to its tranquil setting. In one of the flashbacks, a group of boys torment and humiliate Jack as they take turns at spitting into his mouth while John watches from a distance. Although John is repulsed by the abuse, it is suggested that he is also aroused by it too as he does not intervene. His conflicted feelings seemingly form the basis of his violent attraction to Jack and of his repressed sexual identity. Crucially, it implies to the audience, the power struggles of human relationships and the perverted possibilities of the human libido rather than a perverse sensationalism of homosexual relationships.

Poison uses non-linear narrative to interweave three stories (Hero, Horror, Homo) into one film, to make a quirky but coherent work. The formal innovation with storytelling deliberately avoids the mainstream storytelling structures utilised in mainstream cinema and investigates how these traits are connected to the dominant society. The emphasis on the film's ability to assemble three narrative structures within the film serves to question cinematic conventions. Identification is elicited in many ways in Poison as in each of the stories, the audience is able to take on the perspective of its characters. For example, outsiders (characters that exist in the margins of society) are able to gain control of their individual circumstances: Richie Beacon kills his father and becomes free by "flying through the bedroom window". In all three stories, the character of Beacon particularly, is the only character who has no narrative power. Through interviews, we see members of his community, such as his classmates, school nurse, custodian and gym instructor all give their opinions of the now missing Richie. However, he is the only character in all three stories with point-of-view shots detailing events before his disappearance. Thus, he is afforded a voice through the use of formal techniques that provide character engagement and enables the audience to identify with his point of view through POV shots.
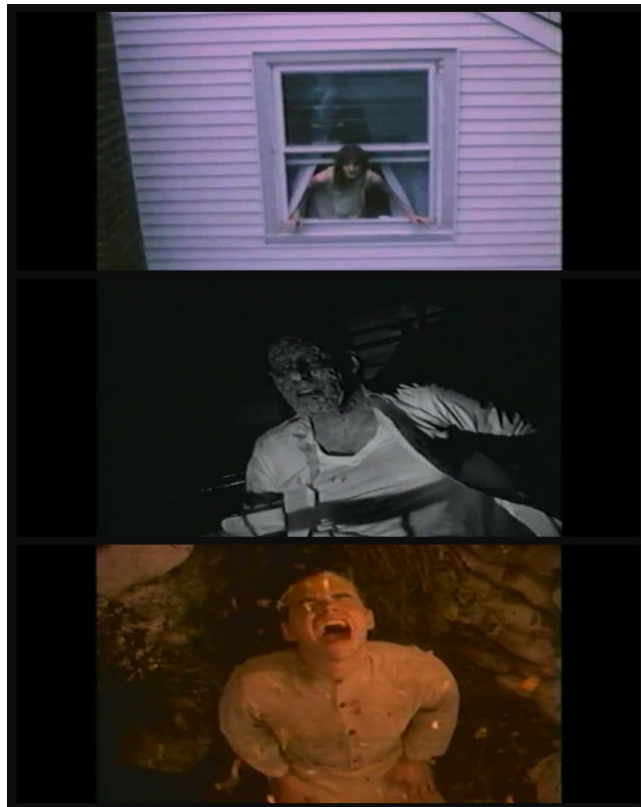
Figure 5.1.2 – Climatic scenes in *Hero, Horror,* and *Homo*

The worlds created by the characters in the three stories are realised outside of the space of their oppressors. In "Homo" John Broom is at the police station, and he narrates his life circumstances:

> Prison was not new to me. I've lived in them all my life. By submitting to prison life, embracing it, I could reject the world that had rejected me.

The film's depiction of this world also provides meaning of empowerment of the marginalised. Through its experimental style also, *Poison* showcases the marginalised characters reclaiming their place in society. In "Hero", a quote on the screen reads:

> A child is born and he is given a name. Suddenly he can see himself. He recognises his
>
> position in the world. For many, this experience, like that of being born, is one of horror.

The audience is further able to assign its meaning through the characters. It could apply to Richie Beacon ("a child is born, and he is given a name"). It could also apply to John Broom ("he recognises his position in the world"). The quote could also relate to Dr Thomas Graves ("for many, this experience, like that of being born, is one of horror"). The assigning of meaning through suggestive quotes thence reveals that all three characters are a part of a whole, despite existing in separate film worlds.

With the character of John Broom being the only first-person narrator in his own story, *possessive* quotes used in the film seems to apply to his own life, such as:

> My heart's in my hand, and my hand is pierced, and my hand's in the bag, and the bag is shut, and my heart is caught.

This is especially true since the quotes precedes a scene where John tries to seduce Jack. Other quotes from the film such as "Love comes slyly like a thief" may apply to Dr Thomas Graves especially since he starts to develop romantic feelings for his colleague, Dr Nancy Olsen. All three stories present character who are victims of sex and violence. The characters in the three stories experience fear, persecution and intolerance and therefore crave escapism from the bleak realities of the world, and such cultural ills are exposed through artistic techniques in filmmaking.

5.2. Conclusion

The films examined in this chapter have provided two forms of representation in indie films: firstly, of social and cultural representation that serves to highlight sociocultural issues in society. This form of representation utilises film form in a way that not only provides meaning of the text to the audience but employs realist approaches in order to ground the characters and the event in the real world. Through its use of realist styles, films like *Go Fish* ensure that a combination of *aesthetic enlightenment* (Kaul, 2014: 139) and *sincere engagement* (MacDowell, 2013: 54) of queer sensibilities. The second form of representation explored in this chapter is in the form of artistic representation which symbolises independent cinema as having *quality*, and *smart* films. This kind of representation indicates how independent films are able to adopt innovative approaches to formal components in film in ways that—as noted by King in Chapter 4.2.1 notes— "undermine genre conventions" (King, 2005: 165). The quality of *smartness* in the film is underscored by its "incongruous narration" (as highlighted in Chapter 4.3.1; Sconce, 2002: 358). Discussions in this chapter have galvanised around the understanding of the arguments surrounding such representation in independent films.

Crucially, this chapter has examined the case for an identity-based cinematic representation through films' embodiment of aesthetic qualities, as well as the case for socio-political representations within the cinema. The chapter analysed *Go Fish* (1994) and *Poison* (1991) to showcase these arguments. Several scholars (including Hillier, [2001]; Tzioumakis, [2006]; Allen, [2003]; Holmlund, [2008]; Waldman, [2008]) have touched on the queer sensibilities of both films.

Bordwell (2019) touches on "artistically motivated narration" in which he describes films that can "'lay bare' a film's narrational principles" (Bordwell, 2019: 24). *Poison* therefore provides the context previously stated by Hillier for which baring its formal devices is justified.

Indeed, both *Go Fish* and *Poison* are films that are a product of their time, in an age where Hollywood cinema was moving towards blockbuster production. Both films represented

alternative approaches to filmmaking in the 1990s. They showed how queer representation was of the utmost importance at the time and paved a path for more films with queer sensibilities that also foster quirky aesthetics. Fraser (2016) buttresses this point, reiterating that "a pressing need to diminish feelings of audience alienation with embodied differences serves as [a] foundational political platform" with films that highlight marginalised communities (Fraser, 2016: 20). He adds that:

> There's an urgent social background against which all of these films develop. That, we believe, is incredibly important to acknowledge in part because it's easy to miss this facet of their politicised objectives beneath the surface of their aestheticised presentations. (Fraser, 2016: 20)

The emotion and affective qualities availabilities both films are not only in the text itself but also in the sociocultural atmosphere in which both films exist. Hence, any ideas of realism that are derived from both rooms is rooted also in its sociocultural context. The emotion and affective experience of both films in terms of queer sensibilities are also reliant on thought and memory based on the lived experiences of the audience, and indeed, a level of consciousness in the cultural context in which the films exist.

Section Three|

Case Studies: Theorising Emotion and Affect in Independent Cinema

CHAPTER SIX: EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN FILMS DIRECTED BY STEVEN SODERBERGH|

It was noted in Chapter 2.2.3 that one way to think about the distinction between independent and Hollywood cinema was through the category of industrial productions that are either big-budget international productions or smaller-budget productions which rely very little on the international market. But such definitions do not simply suffice when examining the content of such films and how and why they differ from other texts sold in a different market. The thesis then proposed aesthetic motivations for thinking about both systems of production through the emotive and affective sensibilities and qualities offered in the films within these two categories. The concept of cognitive theory and its application in film then comes into play. Greg Smith notes that a useful way of approaching film is through the provision of a "terminology for discussing emotions and how they are evoked" (Smith, 2003: 7). Additionally, he argues that engagement with emotion in film:

> "[…] should be able to discuss a wide range of cinematic signification. Films use an enormous set of mechanisms to elicit emotion: lighting, camera, acting, sound, music, mise-en-scène, character, narrative […] and genre conventions. [Additionally], if an approach to filmic emotions concentrates too heavily on one of these mechanisms, then the approach is likely to miss much of the other emotion cuing in the film. (Smith, 2003: 8).

Jakob Lothe in *Narrative in Fiction and Film* makes a similar assertion and posits that one way the audience emotionally engages in film is through events and characters. He argues that "film's surface character and unusual kinetic force cause filmic events to 'hit' the viewer in a completely different way [and] film events manifest themselves as definitive even as they are being visually presented to us—and then disappear" (Lothe, 2000: 85)". Hence, one of the ways in which emotional engagement to a film is made possible is through the film's ability to "combine external features with characterising patterns of speech and action" (Lothe, 2000: 86).

Fernando Canet and Héctor J. Pérez write in *Studies in Documentary Film* that "character engagement is one of the main sources of emotion in the spectator. […] In a nonfiction context, it is the filmmaker, who first engages with [the] subject, with whom [they] maintain […] long-standing everyday relations" (Canet and Pérez, 2016: 215). This point was also highlighted in the introductory portion of the thesis. It was explained there that the utilisation of micro and macro elements in films emphasises all textual and contextual constructions that are derived from it. It was also explained that a crucial way this is achieved is through the form of audience identification with screen characters and events within the film.

Murray Smith (1995; 2022) in *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* argues that when it comes to audience identification and the cultivation of emotional response

to screen characters, there is a need to "break the notion down into a number of more precisely defined concepts: recognition, alignment, and allegiance" (Smith, 2022: 73). Smith posits that these three concepts are "systematically related, together constituting […] the *structure of sympathy"* (ibid.). This structure also is bound by form in the film and do not exist at random. Plantinga argues that "emotions are not free-floating and random" (Plantinga, 2009: 242). Rather, they are "structured states caused by similar circumstances" (ibid.) and those circumstances exist inside of the action space.

It is important to remember that the films that were analysed in chapters 4 and 5 do not answer the very specific question that an analysis of films in chapters 6, 7 and 8 aims to answer. This is because the case study films in the latter three chapters will consist of films made by directors who have produced films for audiences in both independent and Hollywood cinema. As explained in Chapter 3.2, this methodology would specifically address how we might theorise the concepts of emotion and affect in film, and how the concepts of emotion and affect are constructed and manipulated for an indie audience as well as a mainstream audience. Of course, it is possible to theorise emotion and affect in independent cinema solely based on the independent film analysis thus far. However, utilising such a methodology in this thesis would be flawed, particularly as the thesis has recognised that the lines between independent and Hollywood cinema have become blurred, and that is it therefore useful to think of how we might distinguish both cinemas in modern discourse.

As explained in Chapter 3.3 also, the films in Section 2 serve to showcase the multifaceted nature and various elements of independent cinema. The films also provide textual and contextual analysis to some of the theoretical ideas discussed in Section 1. They highlight audience engagement with storytelling, music, aesthetics, and other key components. Since the films explored thus far do no account for Hollywood films analysis, it would not truly fulfil the inquiry of this thesis. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 will also introduce concepts of emotional construction—beginning with emotional engagement in film and then exploring emotional sustainability and sentimentalism in the other two chapters. In order to understand how we might theorise emotion and affect in independent cinema, this section will begin to explore the ways in which emotional engagement—through audience identification—is achieved in both independent and Hollywood films. The thesis now moves to explore this concept in the indie film *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989) and also in the Hollywood film, *Contagion* (2011).

6.1. *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989)

Sex, Lies and Videotape is an independent staple and is discussed in several literature for its impact on the film industry. John Belton notes that at the time of its release, the film ensured that "Hollywood had begun to take notice of indie cinema, sending acquisitions executives to all the major indie festivals to buy distribution rights to whatever seemed the least bit commercial" (Belton, 1994: 401). Jon Lewis adds that the film was financially successful upon release and was "a previously unimaginable sum for such a talky, quirky, intellectually and formally challenging movie" (Lewis, 2008: 393). An evaluation of the emotional engagement in the film therefore seeks to showcase how the film is able to capture the thoughts and emotions of the audience.

The film's form borders on mainstream aesthetics and this is explained in detail by Yannis Tziomakis (*American Independent Cinema: An Introduction*). He suggests that:

> Although both the film's style and narrative structure are relatively conservative […] and therefore locate the film much closer to mainstream Hollywood than to the other alternatives open to independent filmmaking, the pictures stand out in terms of offering a mature and intelligent treatment of sex in contemporary society. (Tzioumakis, 2006: 238)

By emotionally engaging the audience, the film achieves two things: It shows how film form can elicit intimacy between characters on screen. Secondly, it shows how the audience can identify such intimacy in a way that keeps them in close proximity with the characters through its dialogue and formalist style.

The film opens with a jazz score and the speed of the music is mimicked by the camera speed. When the music stops, so does the speed of the camera which utilises a ground level shot. This technique signifies to the audience that the object of the shot is an important player in the story. Ann is at a therapy session, and she expresses to her therapist that being happy is overrated: "The last time I was happy, I got so fat". Her words are accompanied by a closeup shot to emphasise her reaction to her obsession with things in her life that are beyond her control. As her therapy session continues, the camera cuts to a scene where her husband John in his office, in the same moment that the therapist asks Ann, "are you still keeping these things from John?" The tactical use of editing by manipulating dialogue against visual imagery suggests to the audience that John (a character we are yet to be familiar with), is a man with a lot of secrets.

John White and Sabine Haenni (*Fifty Key American Films*) posit that film form in *Sex, Lies and Videotape* through "narrative structure and film language reveals the way film organises […] themes and creates meaning for the audience" (White and Haenni, 2009: 205). This is exemplified through the film's use of cross-cutting techniques that cuts from one action to another as a way of revealing simultaneous instants happening in the movie space. This technique is also used ironically because although Ann's words enable the audience to immerse themselves into the private thoughts of the other characters in the simultaneous actions—and

also reveals certain secrets about them—it is the audience, and not, Ann who are able to cut between the space and time actions. Therefore, the cross-cutting technique establishes narration and the narrative structure as omniscient.

H. Kapalan (*Critical Essays on Anita Desai's Fiction*) describes the omniscient narrator as:

> […] one who surveys all the action from a heightened place. He gives us a close view or a far view of the action. He tells the story of various characters and at times concentrates on individuals. The omniscient narrator is objective and analytical unlike the first-person narrator". (Kapalan, 2000: 34)

In *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, since the audience is afforded information in its opening minutes that Ann is not privy to, it creates character identification with Ann. This is because by knowing details about her life that are not as of yet known to her, it frames Ann as a vulnerable and sympathetic character. Thus, through Murray Smith's structure of sympathy, the audience is able to build "recognition, alignment, and allegiance" (Smith, 2022: 73) with Ann's character through an initial engagement with form (how event sequences are framed).

The scene at the therapist's office mostly makes use of closeup and mid shots to draw sympathy towards the character of Ann. The mid shots are used specifically to show how relaxed Ana feels in sharing her seemingly trivial problems with her therapist. However, the closeup shots, reveal a level of vulnerability in Ann that connotes that there is more substance to her character, and beneath her worries about things she cannot control, is someone who is seeking freedom from "the garbage".

Figure 6.1.1 – Close-up shots and mid shots in the therapist's office

When the camera cuts to the scene with John, he is about to head out of his office. He hesitates for a brief moment—almost as if in response to the therapist's question to Ann: "are you still keeping these things from John?". His hesitance reveals guilt; hence, John is a man who harbours some secrets and experienced guilt about it. While the closeup shots of Ann establishes her vulnerability, the low angle shots of John in the simultaneous action space

conveys power. Ann's conversation with her therapist at the moment in which these shots are applied also establishes John's power in the story, and he exerts his power in many ways in the film, including having an affair with Ann's sister, Cindy.

Ann's vulnerability extends beyond truths that she is unaware of: The way her expressions are captured on camera through closeup shots also leaves her unguarded, which allows the audience to study her (in the same way that her therapist studies her in his office). When Graham—whom she had initially expressed an unwillingness to meet—arrives at her home, both are sat in the living room and the shots used in the scene creates a level of intimacy between both characters. They are equally afforded the same shot sizes that focus on each of their reaction to the other speaking. This creates a level of balance in the emotional engagement with both characters. The use of long, mid and close-up shots help to establish the distance between both of them in their physical space while also creating a level of intimacy through their dialogue.

Figure 6.1.2 – Close-up shot of Ann and Graham

When Graham asks Ann what she likes about being married, she replies, "You know the cliche about the security of it? Well, that's true… And we own this house, it's a nice house… And John has just made partner, and I really like that". Ann's sighing and nervous laughter when she speaks about her marriage reveals the exhaustion she feels and the vapidness that clouds her marriage. In what feels like a second therapy session, the scene further builds on the sympathy the audience feels towards Ann.

The physical and emotional distance between both characters is also observed in the scene where Graham and Ann are at a bistro. Their topic of conversation reveals a desire for closeness, even as they are sat on opposite sides of the table. The angle of the camera and the shot sizes again, creates emotional engagement with both characters in a way that reveals their intimate thoughts. On the topic of sex, Ann talks about the importance of an emotional connection: "I think that sex is overrated. I think that people place far too much importance on

it". Graham, however, describes the importance of the physical aspect of sex. The scene also reveals Graham's interest in Ann: "I've been watching you. I watch you eat. I watch you speak. Watch you move. I see someone who is extremely aware of people looking at you". At the end of the movie, the physical distance between the two fades as both Graham and Ann are now emotionally intertwined. The end scene at the end of the film also clarifies the character of Graham as a motif in the film. He is the answer to all Ann's problems (the garbage) which as revealed in the start of the film, is of great concern and burden to her.

Figure 6.1.3 – Juxtaposition: Distance and closeness

Smith posits that "the three basic levels of engagement must be supplemented by concepts accounting for 'empathic' phenomena—affective mimicry and emotional simulation—if a comprehensive theory of 'identification' is to be constructed" (Smith, 2022: 73). These concepts are demonstrated through an availability of closeness (through camera work), the subject of physical and emotional intimacy (through dialogue and spatial arrangement) as well as the characters' propensity for sympathy. For most of the film, Ann embodies fragility and vulnerability and her lack of insight on matters surrounding her personal life reveals her to be a character to be pitied. However, this changes when Ann pays Graham a visit and she agrees to be interviewed by him.

Figure 6.1.4 – Ann: Spectacle to spectator

Ann suddenly wields Graham's camera and turns it on him, signifying that she is no longer the object of the audience's gaze. The audience's extra knowledge and omniscience presence in the story is therefore diminished as she invites the then to turn their attention to Graham. For the first time in the film, she is in control of *the narrative* as she challenges Graham's motives (both for having several tapes of women he has previously interviewed as well as his intentions for the tape he is currently recording). Just as Ann has gained control, Graham on his part, experiences extreme discomfort and vulnerability for the first time in the film. Ann recognises his vulnerability and moves closer to soothe him. In so doing, she gains control of her life. She knows all (her husband's affair and her sister's betrayal), she sees all (Graham's affection towards her) and she now possesses the power to act accordingly.

6.2. *Contagion* (2011)

Contagion is a 2011 film by Steven Soderbergh that centres around a pandemic. When a woman and her son die on the same day from an infection, it leads to the discovery of a deadly virus that soon send the world into a panic. As various countries around the world try to deal with the fallout of the outbreak, the film focuses on the handling of the pandemic in the US as officials desperately try to curb the virus amidst worldwide panic. The film lends itself as analogous to the human condition with characters reacting to the big event that is well beyond their control. The *invisible enemy*, the virus, then becomes the agent of causality, and the storytelling is constructed around the speed and rate at which the virus spreads. The combination of the existential threat that the pandemic invokes as well as the human reaction to it, also creates a different contagion through symbolism. When his colleague Lorraine refuses to publish his story about the virus, the character of Alan angrily expresses that "print media is dying". The film builds on the role that conspiracy theories/theorists play during times

of civil unrest. It therefore signals to the audience that misinformation, disinformation, and a lack of information through the panic and chaos, presents a separate kind of social issue in the action space, as the quest for knowledge and resolve grows increasingly more crucial in the action space.

Figure 6.2.1 – Symbolism through character as motif

On Day Two of the pandemic, the film sets up events with fast-paced shots. It is revealed within a very short space of time that people from different parts of the world are dying. The textual cues that establish time, day and place helps the audience to monitor the spread of events. By Day 3, the film establishes the active players in the film. It focuses on the CDC in Atlanta led by Dr Cheever. It also highlights the point-of-view of the media in San Francisco, particularly on the character of Alan who is looking to publish his story about the virus. By Day 4 of the event, Beth (played by Gwyneth Paltrow, and who the audience is introduced to on Day 2), and her son die from the virus. The fast-paced shots on Day 2 are accompanied by equally brisk electronic soundtrack to convey fair an anxiety that is being felt in the action space.

Figure 6.2.2 – Slow-paced scenes invoking meaningful loss

The pace of the film is eventually slowed when Mitch finds out about the death of his wife on Day 4. This is done to invoke sympathy from the audience and to give the audience room to internalise loss and grief. This slow-paced scene is repeated towards the end of the movie when Mitch mourns his wife.

Contagion uses piano score to convey hope in the scene where Doctor Hextall finds a cure for the virus. The same piano score is also utilised to convey tragedy and loss when Dr

Mears dies. However, when unfamiliar characters (including Mitch's son) in the story die, the film uses fast-paced music to convey horror and fear. As a signifier of emotion, Claudia Gorbman argues that music may "set specific moods and emphasise particular emotions suggested in the narrative [...] but first and foremost, it is a signifier of emotion itself" (Gorbman, 1987: 73). Additionally, music "gives referential and narrative cues" as well as "interprets and illustrates narrative events" (ibid.). Patrick Keating echoes this point in *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* stating that "music contributes to point of view in various ways: shaping our evaluations of various characters, expressing sympathy for their emotional states, and managing the overall sense of epistemic distance" (Keating, 2020: 52).

Figure 6.2.3 – Framing of piano score with juxtaposing meanings

At the point in which a cure has been found for the virus, Mitch's daughter Jory and Andrew have their prom. Music for the first time in the film, switches from the distance and isolation of non-diegetic music to the intimacy of diegetic music as 'All I Want is You' by U2 plays in Mitch's living room. The film uses juxtaposition in this scene to draw the audience's attention to human interactions and relationships. It implies love gained and love lost through U2's song. Jory and Andrew represent hope for the future as they can be seen smiling and dancing in the living room. Mitch represents loss and tragedy of the past as he cries alone in his room. Both variations of emotion are emphasised in the words of U2 song: "But all the promises we make, from the cradle to the grave, when all I want is you".

The audience is kept engaged emotionally through the themes of panic, perseverance, and collapse of social order. It is presented through the paradox of alienation, invoked by fear, and the distance from others due to isolation and quarantine. But the collaboration that is required through working together to limit the spread is also suggested in the story. The resolve of this paradox is navigated through various characters and facilitates a range of emotions to the audience during the process. This is further established through several characters who undergo emotional shifts. On Day 14, for example, Dr Orantes is held hostage in Hong Kong

and is used as leverage in exchange for the vaccines. While held captive, she grows closer with the villagers and takes up teaching in the village; and upon her release, she is seen heading back to Hong Kong upon learning that the vaccines they have received are in fact placebos. The audience is also kept engaged through the use of movie stars and well-known figures that are familiar to them as a means of representing authority and maintaining emotion and interest. Thus, Matt Damon, Jude Law, Lawrence Fishburne and Gwyneth Paltrow and Dr Sanjay Gupta (who plays himself in the film) are featured in the film. This provides emotional engagement since there is already an established relationship with the characters outside of the movie space.

The highlighting of the days on screen, since the events of the film started, surmounts to 135 days in the movie time. It serves to emphasise how quickly society can collapse and adds an extra layer of fear in the viewing experience. At the end of the movie, it is revealed that Beth is an Aimm Alderson executive and that her company is responsible for bulldozing a rainforest in China. It is also revealed that a bat from the forest flies into a pig farm where it drops a banana which is then eaten by one of the pigs. The now dead pig is handled by a chef in a casino in Hong Kong who then shakes hands with Beth as he rushes to greet her without washing his hands. The sound design returns as the origin of the virus is revealed, with the textual cue, 'Day 1' on the screen. The cause and effect of events shown leading up to Day 1 highlights the consequence of environmental mismanagement.

Figure 6.2.4 – Emphasis on the beginning, an end, and a new beginning

6.3. Conclusion

Emotional engagement in this chapter has been explored more broadly, although an attention to formal elements that elicit certain emotional states have been specifically examined. In the midst of a chaotic event in *Contagion* that is beyond the control of the characters on screen,

the film utilises a cultivation of emotional responses to the characters who embody emotions caused by *the event*. Since the event is beyond their control, their reaction to it is then conditioned by the affective event. The reader will recall Table 4.1 in Chapter 4.2 which was proposed in other to lay the claim that the film text embodies affect though form which serves as the subject of affect. The reader will also recall that in Chapter 2.3.4, it was explained that affect manifests as *unintentional* and *unconscious* while also *unfolding context* in film. To say that film event is affective, is to imply that the event serves as the primary driver for unfolding meaning of narrative, rather than being driven by the film characters. An event becomes affective when the event—rather than the film characters—is able to measure the level of intensity of visual imagery, and unconsciously manage the permeability of meaning in the narrative by gradually unfolding context. In *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, Ann takes control of her circumstances when Graham interviews her and she exerts power for the first time in her life. Her struggle is personal (sexual repression, dissatisfaction, and vulnerability) and therefore her road to self-discovery, and the resulting identification to her character, is rooted in her recognition of *the self*. Like the pace of the film suggests, the journey to self-discovery is slow and requires personal change.

In *Contagion*, the emphasis on the event implies that the fast-paced technique employed in the narrative—similar to the *fastness* in the spread of the virus and chaos—requires the characters to conform to the event's malleability. The audience therefore engages with the several active characters insofar as such characters engage with the event. Hence, emotional engagement, although owning to an identification with the screen characters in both films, requires a clarification that the way in which "recognition, alignment and allegiance" (Smith, 2022: 73) are formed in both instances is dependent on the type of narrative that accommodates the presence of such characters.

Smith notes that the film characters are "salient elements of narrative structure, but we should never lose sight of the fact that characters are, nevertheless, parts of larger structures" (Smith, 2022: 73). Thus, the audience's affection (state) through textual and contextual constructions, and towards a character in a character-driven narrative, then becomes of a different identification to the engagement with characters in an event-driven narrative. The moments in which the audience is able to cognitively (not emotionally) identify with the character of Mitch in *Contagion* (in the same way that they identify with Ann in *Sex, Lies and Videotape*) is through his affective state that creates meaning. This is represented in the film after the event driver (the pandemic) is diminished. Mitch is alone in his room, and he engages with self through his emotions for the first time in the film. Through expressions of loss and

grief, it is suggested that he is no longer reacting (subconsciously to the chaos around him) but feeling (identifying with his innermost self).

CHAPTER SEVEN: EMOTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY IN FILMS DIRECTED BY NICK CASSAVETES|

The notions of 'mood' and 'feelings' within the emotion system have been explored in nearly every chapter thus far, albeit in varying capacities. As part of this thesis' enquiry into the way emotion and affect functions in cinema, it will prove useful to examine emotional sustainability in film. This comes from an examination into how emotion is sustained through certain film elements such as narrative structure. Emotional sustainability can be understood through filmic moods since (as suggested in Chapter 2.3) the affective state of mood helps in sustaining the intentional state of emotion.

It is important to note however, that the experience of mood in the human sense (situated in the mind and body) differs from an observation of mood in the filmic sense (situated in the text). Brian Henderson writes in *Film Quarterly* on narrative discourse, stating that "distance and perspective" are elements of mood in film. He explains that:

> The narrative can furnish more or fewer details, rendered in a more or less direct way, and can thus seem to keep at a greater or lesser distance from what it tells. That distance need not be fixed throughout a narrative but may vary, according to the knowledge of one or more participants in the story, adopting what is usually called their point of view. Thus, the narrative seems to take on, with regard to the story, one or another perspective. (Henderson, 1983: 13)

Here, Henderson suggests that a film's mood can present in the way a story is told and perceived. A film narrative's ability to reveal knowledge to the audience (through the varying level of detail, directness, and distance from the story) and through adopting the narrative's flexible perspective, are ways of determining the mood and tone of the narrative, as well as influencing the audience's interpretation of events. Human moods are often less specific in its intention; hence a depressive state could be felt for a long period of time with no deducible reason. Filmic moods are far less unintentional in the sense that the audience is able to identify the cause and reason for the implicit mood or tone in a film or scene and, as Henderson notes, create flexible distance and/or perspective in the narrative/story. Mood and tone identification is thence achieved through the *presenting elements*, such as through affective characters embodying real/human moods or through formal elements within the narrative that elicit a type of filmic mood. Thus, the ability to identify a film as upbeat or sad depends on the recognition of such presenting formal elements.

Emotional sustainability in film can also be examined through the *Principle of Constancy* as proposed by Freud (2015). The thesis discussed the *pleasure* and *reality* principles in Chapter 4.3. It was noted that the former principle deals with the acquisition of pleasure through critical thinking. The reality principle, however, suspends or delays the acquisition of pleasure which is soon overpowered by the pleasure principle (since the pleasure principle is informed

by biological instincts that cannot be educated) (Freud, 2015: 9). The principle of constancy therefore follows from the other two principles and is defined by Freud as "the tendency to keep intracerebral excitation constant" (Freud, 2015: 12). The form within film that infers meaning to the audience implies that there is a requirement of such meanings to be mentally processed (in what can lead to an emotional response, although the cognitive exercise does not necessarily yield an outward expression of emotion [pleasure]). Hence, mental processes—which create organisation and understanding of events—create the tendency for the elicitation of emotions, which must first begin with felt bodily states (from the object of the emotion which is the affective screen character) and which, depending on film form, creates/activates an affective programme that regulates such emotional availabilities. The sustainability of a mood or tone within such schema will thence be dependent on *how* formal devices makes emotions available to the audience.

Based on the Freud's Principle of Constancy, and indeed, Henderson's proposition of distance and perspective in narrative structure, emotional sustainability in this thesis will account for: (a) the extent to which the film narrative provides consistency in emotional tone and mood. When there is a sudden shift in tone and mood, it brings the audience out of the immersive experience of film and disrupts emotional engagement; (b) the use of pacing in narrative structure. There is no doubt that when a film is well-paced, the audience is able to steadily maintain engagement with narrative which sustains interest and builds anticipation for unfolding events; (c) character development. Much like narrative pacing, when film characters are shown to embody complex emotions and emotional depth—that inadvertently drives the characters' beliefs and the way they view the world—the audience is able to sustain emotional engagement with the film's storytelling and themes.

How then might we measure a film's ability to not only maintain but also manage the audience's emotional engagement of film narrative? One way this can be approached is through *mood cues*. For example, a film might adopt repetitive music in certain scenes in the film in order to sustain an emotion of joy, sadness or fear. A *lingering/*sustained mood in film is achieved when there is an engagement with other formal devices within the narrative structure of the film. The thesis will now analyse how emotional sustainability is exemplified in *John Q.* (2002) and *My Sister's Keeper* (2009).

7.1. *John Q.* (2002)

John Q. is a film directed by Nick Cassavetes and distributed by New Line Cinema. Before delving into analysis of the film, it is important to clarify the context in which the film was

produced and released. The reader will recall that in the introductory chapter, the thesis mentioned that part of the reason the discourse surrounding the blurred lines between Hollywood and Independent cinemas persists, is due of the affiliation that some independent companies have (and have had) with major studios (such as New Line Cinema and Miramax). At the time of *John Q.*'s release in 2002, New Line Cinema had been owned by Time Warner for six years (which it acquired as part of Turner Broadcasting System). Nonetheless, New Line Cinema remained a separate entity from Time Warner (Variety, 2012) and continued to market and distribute theatrical releases as well as home video. When Time Warner merged with Warner Bros. in 2008 however, New Line Cinema as an independent studio was shut down (Variety, 2012), following the release of its last film as an independent company, *Semi-Pro.*

In Chapter 2.1.1, King (2005) and Tzioumakis (2006) were cited in the discussion on the definition of independent cinema. It was noted that while the qualities of independent films vary both in form and degree, one of the orientations of such films is in the social issues that such films concern themselves with. As King argues, some independent films do maintain a closer relationship with Hollywood, especially those "in the grey area", which include "'studio-owned/affiliated', 'specialist' or 'independent' labels" (King, 2005: 3). *John Q.* conforms to this orientation of independent filmmaking. The industrial context provided above shows that New Line Cinema still operated as an independent in 2002. Aesthetically also, *John Q.*— existing in the *grey area* of independent film production (as a specialist label)— still bears the hallmarks of independent films in the way that it represents social issues.

John Q. centres around John Archibald, his wife Denise and their son Michael 'Mike'. The family faces financial hardship after John's working hours are slashed. Their situation is exacerbated when Michael is taken to the hospital after he collapses during a baseball game. At the hospital, John and Denise are informed that Michael has an enlarged heart and will require a heart transplant. John must raise the sum of $75,000 in order to get Michael's name on the donor list. The audience is able to follow the character of John as he plunges into desperation that causes him to reach a breaking point. He guides the audience through the step-by-step process of seeking medical care which simultaneously exposes the broken healthcare system in America. The film begins with landscape shots with cars on the highway (and visual imagery similar to the road shots in *Broken Flowers*). As 'Ave Maria' plays from a driver's car radio, the camera closes in on the religious ornaments in the car before the impatient driver collides with a truck going in the opposite direction. The use of religious, choral music in the beginning of the film along with focussing on religious symbols of veneration serves to underline some of the film's themes of faith and unconditional love.

The film's utilisation of film form and its adoption of representation emphasises themes of random fate, class struggle and medical ethics. The character of John is able to propel these themes through the narrative which allows for emotional engagement to be sustained throughout the film. From the beginning of the film, there is a sense of foreboding that is offered in dialogue between John and his son Michael:

> Mike: We're a family, we've got to stick together, right?
> John: That's right.
> Mike: See you later.
> John: Bye Mike.
> Mike: Not goodbye, I hate goodbye, remember? See you later!

The foreshadowing helps to prepare the audience for the events that is yet to unfold and helps to signals to the audience, the need to be wary.

The subject matter in the film focuses on class warfare in American society, and John and his family are presented simply as symptoms of a broader societal issue. They represent marginalised members of society who exist in a world that holds very little regard for them and their circumstances. This is observed in the way John and Denise are treated in the hospital where they are offered very little hope on Mike's prospects of getting a heart transplantation. The film utilises montage shots of John in his quest to acquire the deposit sum for Mike's procedure through friends, neighbours, and the church. The shots offered builds frustration in the audience as it becomes increasingly clear that John will not be able to come up with the required sum. (The couple are given the run-around as they try to find financial aid from various institutions and programmes.) As Mike's heart monitor beeps, it indicates a race against time which further amplifies the tension in the story and the frustration that John is running out options. John soon reaches a breaking point, and his frustrations turn into anger. His subsequent actions change the course of the film's narrative, and his life. John goes to the hospital and pulls out a gun on Doctor Turner, taking him hostage, along with everyone in the emergency unit, in a bid to make the doctor perform Mike's heart surgery. John soon attracts the attention of the police, news outlets, and the public. The remaining hospital staff give each of the patients the treatment for which they came to the emergency room for, and their opinion of John gradually shifts in his favour.

As John and the hostages reflect on the shortcomings of America's healthcare system amidst the growing chaos outside of the hospital, the dialogue that ensues emphasises the theme of class struggle to the audience. It is the first time since Mike's diagnosis that John has experienced some calmness even at such a pivotal point in the story. The brief calmness and stillness are reflected in the spatial organisation with all the hostages in relaxed positions. One of the nurses mentions to John that Mike's condition could have been better handled:

> HMOs pay their doctors not a test. That's their way of keeping costs down. If insurance says they won't cover them, the doctor keeps his mouth shut. And come Christmas, the HMO sends the doctor a fat ass bonus cheque.

Through their conversation the audience is able to gain more insight into the system that works to undermine growth. The healthcare crisis, crony capitalism and bureaucracy that are direct causes of the class warfare are revealed in the film. The revelations offered in the dialogue further sustains feelings of frustration and anger in the audience even with the perceived calmness within the frame. By equally focussing on all the characters in the room, the camera reveals their reaction to the subject which enables the audience to identify with each of their perspectives.

Figure 7.1.1 – Drawing emphasis on subject matter through character recognition

In an emotionally charged scene, John's friend Jimmy is interviewed by a reporter, and Jimmy too expresses his anger and frustration with the healthcare system that has forced John into his current predicament:

> None of this had to happen. If John had just been a millionaire, or his last name had been Rockefeller. But you know, sometimes John don't know, he don't understand. What we hold sacred in this country isn't values its value [currency] that's important. We got haves and we got have nots. We got white collar, blue collar and then we got no collar. Inside there, we got surgery, outpatient surgery and we got out-of-luck surgery.

As the Jimmy's speaks and John watches his friend on the TV screen, the camera shot gradually closes in on John's face which implies that there is a gradual realisation from John of the strong alliance he has gained so far, both within and outside of the hospital. Hope is thence offered

for the first time in the film with Jimmy serving as a social conduit by commenting on the state of society to the rest of the (film) world.

Figure 7.1.2 – Close-up shot to emphasise facial-feedback

The film utilises media personalities from the real world to emphasise the urgency of the health care crisis. The vérité-style employed in the montage serves to ground the socio-political issue in the real world, beyond the action space. The application of fiction and non-fiction here unveils an equal truth both in the real and movie world. Hence, the film uses real-life video clips (such as clips of Hillary Clinton) as well as video clips created for the purpose of the film, using real-life talk show hosts (such as clips from David Letterman and Jay Leno) in order to emphasise the healthcare crisis as an existential issue. When John prepares to end his life in order to save his son, his wife learns that a recently deceased organ donor (the woman killed in the motorist accident in the beginning of the film) with Michael's blood type has been found and that her heart is about to arrive at the hospital for a transplant. The scene emphasises the themes of random fate, faith and unconditional love. At the end of the film, John is driven away to await sentencing while Michael thanks him from a distance for all he did to save his life. The shots from the beginning and the end of the film symbolise a journey of fate. In the first shot, the impatient driver becomes a victim of a fatal car crash (coincidentally, she is an organ donor, and her heart is used in Mike's transplantation surgery). In the second shot, John is on the road to prison where he will face the consequences of his actions, but unlike the driver in the first shot, there is hope for John.

Figure 7.1.3 – Symbolism of consequences

7.2. My Sister's Keeper (2009)

My Sister's Keeper is a film about Anna and her family who struggles to cope with the terminal cancer of her older sister, Kate. As Kate's cancer worsens, Anna sues their parents through the help of a lawyer in order to procure a medical emancipation that would prevent any further donations of her organs, tissue and blood to Kate. Emotional sustainability is constructed through the element of first-person narration. It also utilises text cues on screen when characters are first introduced to the audience so signify a shift in narrative power. The film begins with Anna's perspective about her lived experience with her sister. Shot with a wide lens and a highly saturated colour composition, the film initially sets a tone of excitement, particularly accompanied with shots of the family having a good time in their back garden. Even as Anna expresses the struggles in the family through narration, the bright colours provide hope to the audience that they are learning to cope with their struggles.

The narrative control in the film soon shifts to her father, Brian. He echoes the tone set by the visual style through his personal perspective:

> Having a sick child is a full-time occupation. Sure, we still enjoy the usual day-to-day happiness of family life; big house, great kids, beautiful wife… but underneath the exterior, there are cracks, resentments alliances that threaten the foundation of our lives as at any moment, our whole world could come tumbling down.

In the first narrative instance, Anna appears to have come to an acceptance about the reality of her existence and perhaps her life's purpose:

> I'm not a coincidence, I was engineered for a particular reason… a scientist hooked up my father's sperm and my mother's eggs to make a specific combination of genes. He did it to save my sister's life… Coincidence or not, I'm here.

In the second instance, Brian appears to be very aware of his family's reality, one that he seems to contemplate very often as he is shown to be lost in thought during the sequence, and for the

duration of the happy family moment in the garden. Both perspectives set the tone of melancholy in the story. By inwardly acknowledging their tragic reality, Anna and Brian set a tone in the film that established a yearn for release that gives the audience a level of anticipation for resolution.

The audience is soon introduced to Campbell Alexander, the lawyer with whom Anna consults with to assist in seeking medical emancipation from her parents. Campbell too, is given narrative power in the film and in so doing, *My Sister's Keeper* provides perspective from a character outside of the *lived experience* (this means that Campbell is far removed from the daily struggles that comes with Kate's illness). Campbell is positioned as an active character in the story as he expands on Anna's voiceover sequence about how she was *engineered* for her sister. Campbell gives details in his narration about how many *things* had been *taken* from Anna since birth. He also becomes an active character when he decides to take on her case and his actions directly moves the plot in a meaningful way.

The next first-person narrator is Anna's mother, Sara. In her sequence, she thinks back to a time when "the kids were just kids, and everyone was happy". Her voiceover is accompanied by flashback visuals where she takes a sick Kate to the hospital and discovers she has cancer for the first time. Noteworthy is the fact that Sara's perspective is established within the narrative only after the perspective of a character (Campbell) outside of the family's lived experience, which suggests to the audience that her perspective is fairly secondary (but not unsignificant) in comparison to the other characters in the story development. Sara's sequence represents a character in *the lived experience* who is stuck in the past and longs to go back to a time without chaos and unhappiness. For Anna and Brian, there is an acknowledgment of the present and a realisation that there are implicit issues within the family trying to strive for happiness. For Sara, there is an acknowledgement of a time before the present where things were truly good. The implication though, is that Anna is far removed from this perspective (because in the time sequence of Sara's flashback, Anna has not yet been born) and her birth was merely a means to a return to normalcy.

Figure 7.1.4 – The five active characters in *My Sister's Keeper*

After Sara's sequence comes her son Jesse's. The audience is able to study his thoughts and feeling as Kate is rushed to the hospital. He reveals his thoughts on the dynamics that exist within his family. The perspective from all five active characters sets unpleasant moods in the film. Their perspectives reveal each of their motivations, personalities, and even moral judgment. For Anna, she is done being used as a donor for her sister and demands an acknowledgement of self, freedom of choice and body autonomy. Brian is sympathetic to Anna and has a enhanced awareness of the situation facing his family and the consequence of the choice that each person makes. For Campbell, his motivation is preserved in his acceptance to helping Anna: an ally to Anna while she seeks to emancipate herself from her parents. In the case of Sara, she is determined to save Kate by any means necessary at the expense of Anna and her wishes. She is, also presented as being in denial of reality of Kate's worsening condition. For Jesse, he is a close observer who, although is not explicit in his concerns about his family's issues, is shown to have love for his family.

The audience is only presented with Kate's narration sequence after the perspectives of the other five characters have been established. Arguably, it is because in the film, the object

of the emotion is not the focus of the story, rather, the subjects are. Since Kate's life is dependent—rather significantly—on another character in the story; and that character has become an unwilling participant, her perspective thence becomes secondary in the story. Moreover, as Kate is the object for emotion in the story (cause), the film focuses on the subjects of said emotion and how they are affected by it. Kate's perspective reveals resolve and an acceptance of fate (her imminent death). It also reveals guilt that she harbours about her brother in depriving him of the attention he would have received were it not for her diagnosis (her brother's dyslexia diagnosis went unnoticed for a long time). She expresses appreciation for her father and mother and their sacrifices for her at the expense of their marriage. There is contrition directed at her sister for her inability to protect her as a big sister would.

Since the subjects of the emotions are a focus in the story, the emotional sustainability of the story is thence reliant on the first event (Kate's resolve to die and her request for Anna to seek medical emancipation) that drives the *active five* within the story. The film is reliant on narrative structure through narration and narrative techniques; and formal elements are conventional in their utilisation. The film form therefore generates passivity in the audience. This is because the first-person narration (or the telling narration) generates a passive (hearing) audience to accept each point of view as their own truth within the narrative without a need for evaluation/critical analysis. Emotional sustainability is therefore dependent on the wielder of narrative power which is only possible with the presence of an event that commands such a power. Hence, the narrative structure has the propensity to generate unpleasant filmic moods, from sadness to annoyance; to pleasant moods established though flashback sequences such as happiness and serenity.

The beginning and end shots of the film also highlight the affective quality of the film's tone. At the start of the film, the side shot of Anna signifies a conflict of mind, and uncertainty about the future. However, at the end of the film, there is resolve within self and an appreciation of life's experiences. These juxtaposing shots are from the same scene where the family is on holiday after Kate's death, but they are framed as two different scenes to reveal certain truths about the character.

Figure 7.1.5 – Conflict and resolution through framing

As explained previously, filmic mood is also showcased through narrative technique. The flashback sequences that break the sustained mood in the film do so because the active characters are wildly unfeatured in these flashback sequences, thus, the audience's engagement with the passive characters is also passively observed and their embodied emotions only serve to break the sustained emotion from the present circumstances. For example, in the flashback scene that reveals that Jesse is dyslexic or in the sequence that reveals how Kate lost her first love to cancer; although both scenes elicit sadness, they produce a disconnect with emotional sustainability. There is no more pressing moment than the present with Anna's quest for body autonomy. This is also arguably why there is little sympathy evoked for the character of Sara as her voiceovers are presented through flashback visuals. It connotes that she is simply stuck in the past, and the flashbacks only represent her irrationality. The audience is able to maintain interest in the story because there is an anticipation for the outcome of Anna's lawsuit and Kate's fate as a consequence.

Although Sara elicits a certain distance that presents her as irrational rather than a sympathetic figure, her character elicits intrigue in the audience as there are equal implications for her acceptance of Kate's fate. There is also an interest surrounding the development of her character through an acknowledgement of the present. The audience is compelled to expect perception from the affective characters, based on the knowledge the characters themselves have acquired through revelations in the movie space. The moment of clarity eventually presents itself when Kate shares her memory book with Sara, containing all of her good memories. There is a sudden realisation from Sara that Kate's fate is inevitable, and she breaks down and cries in Kate's arms, suggesting that she is eventually letting go of her denial. Kate too, lets go and dies on the same night. The scene uses a camera angle that slowly moves toward a higher angle, and its movement emphasises Sara's vulnerability and creates a diminished tension in the film. The interest that her character commands means that there is an investment

on how she navigates through her emotions. The vulnerability elicited through the high angle shot also signifies an end and a resolution to the audience's intrigue.

Figure 7.1.6 – High angle shot: Sara finally lets go

7.3. Conclusion

The chapter started off by delineating emotional sustainability as an aspect of emotion and affect. It noted that the notion can be understood through the presenting elements within the narrative structure. That is, the affective character who themselves embody emotion as well as the element of form. Freud's *Principle of Constancy* was also noted as a means of understanding the way in which form infers meaning through the tendency of such formal adoptions to produce cognitive engagement. The character and event in film therefore provides a means of looking into how emotion is sustained in film. It can be argued that *John Q.* is character driven while *My Sister's Keeper* is event driven. *John Q.* follows the character of John even as he is an active character and an agent of causality who changes the course of the event in the narrative. *My Sister's Keeper*, as the title suggests, refers to the keeper, who is Anna. But the element of narrative power is granted to several characters in the film, with characters of Brian, Campbell, Sara and Jesse. This diminishes the focus on one character and shifts to the event that several characters are experiencing at the same time, which in this case is the dying sister who requires body parts from Anna in order to survive. It also strengthens the event-driven debate to note that Kate is neither an active nor passive character (see Fig. 7.1.4) she simply exists within the story, as a catalyst, embodying the event that changes everyone else's life but hers (indeed, it is her acceptance of her unchanging fate that cases the event of the film after she encourages Anna to seek bodily autonomy).

Mood in *John Q.* is sustained by way of the principle of constancy. The audience is able to mentally process John's actions in his personal decision to hold people in the hospital hostage, to how he rationalises his actions in order to save his son. The audience also observes how the hostages begin to warm up to John when he reveals the motivation for his actions. In

the case of *My Sister's Keeper*, the focus shifts to several bodies of motivation, and in doing so, reveals characters who create their own paths as a reaction to *the event*. Both films underscore Henderson's (1983) mood elements of *distance* and *perspective*. In *John Q.*, the emotion of socio-moral disgust is sustained because the audience is able to follow John's financial struggles—and hence his perspective—and observe the system that actively works against him. In *My Sister's Keeper*, the film's narrative creates varying levels of distance and closeness to each character which is emphasised with how each character's perspective is presented. Some characters are afforded flashback sequences that enable the audience to understand their perspective while others are afforded first-person narration. The sympathy the audience feels for each character in the film therefore shifts as the narrative takes on "one or another perspective" (Henderson, 1983: 13). *John Q.* has "the tendency to keep intracerebral excitation constant" (Freud, 2015: 12) through its narrative structure that allows for character identification to prolong felt bodily states for a significant period in the film.

This is not a criticism of *My Sister's Keeper*'s approach to mood-making, rather, it is to draw attention to how the element of narration can structure emotional engagement but also emphasise the duality of emotional sustainability. That is, in both how the audience is able to identify with an affective character through the film's formalist style, but also in how the narrative structure positions the character within the story (either as active or passive). And such character positioning creates sustained filmic states (by way of emotion and affect) through identification. In *John Q.*, the audience assumes activity as they have to study John's psyche as he desperately tries to save his son. The frustration that continues to build is sustained even at the point at which the frame assumes inactivity in the hospital (and action heightens from outside the hospital space) as the hostages and John converse. It does not suspend focus on the audience's attachment to John. In *My Sister's Keeper*, the audience is permitted to assume passivity in the story. Not because there are no availabilities for character identification, but because the first-person narration affords the audience an invitation to listen, rather than think or fill in blanks. The audience is not required to play an active role in understanding the *impliciticy* of the story, or an unconscious meaning to character motivations as they inform us (through first person narration and through the film's use of flashbacks to educate the audience) at every step of what they are feeling and what their motivations are.

Both films begin to create an understanding of how emotion is offered—and mood sustained—to an audience within the equally active screen spaces in both films. The emphasis on the importance of time is featured in both films. John is on a race against time to save his son (in *John Q.*), and Sara, her daughter (in *My Sister's Keeper*). Based on the film analysis in

this chapter, the thesis now makes five distinctive claims about how emotion is sustained in indie film.

Firstly, if the object of the audience's emotional experience is decentralised amongst several active bodies on screen, then filmic moods cannot be sustained in the same way that it would be if there was a singular active body. Secondly, in order for the audience to sustain emotional engagement through an affective active or passive character (that is, a character who embodies affect and/or sets the tone of unfolding events), or through an engagement with formal elements in the narrative, the audience must be positioned as active viewers within and/or outside the movie space. Thirdly, if emotion is to be sustained in film, it cannot also be embodied by several active screen characters. This is because such affective characters are reacting to something (an event) that is causing them to assume *activity*. Hence, the audience's focus from *effect* to *cause* could produce a sudden shift in tone or mood which disrupts emotional sustainability of film narrative. On a fourth note, in order to achieve emotional sustainability—where the audience is positioned as an active viewer—the film must employ a singular active film character. Since the character is a sole agent of causality in the story, the audience can then follow the character's journey in the film space, or the journey of other characters through the perspective of the sole active character. Finally, emotion can also be sustained—through an alternative configuration of the second conception above—if emotions are embodied by several passive characters in the story (this is because the audience will assume activity and utilise cognition and judgement to interpret narrative and make meaning in the absence of screen action).

These conceptions therefore provide a pathway through which we might understand the function of emotion and affect in indie films, that is, through the character/event and active/passive viewer discourse. The next chapter will examine the notion of sentimentalism in film. Having examined the way in which emotion is sustained in film, an exploration of sentimentalism gives an insight into how films are able to build on sentimental value in films and what formal techniques enable such emotions.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SENTIMENTALISM IN FILMS DIRECTED BY DARREN ARONOFSKY|

The previous chapter revealed emotion is sustained in films. Character-driven storytelling, for example, ensures that the audience can take on an active position in the viewing experience. Also, by observing character performance, the audience is able to make *moral judgements of characters* (as previously mentioned by Plantinga, [2018: 123] in Chapter 4.3). Additionally, by engaging with other aesthetic expressions such as theme and existential moral questions, the audience is able to engage in introspection while also eliciting empathy and catharsis, both of which could foster feelings of sentimentalism.

The subject of sentimentalism is utilised in this thesis to show how various ideas surrounding emotion function in both independent and Hollywood films. As the thesis continues to create a pathway through which we might theorise emotion and affect in cinema, a part of that effort includes exploring ideas through which the constructions of emotions are made possible. Hence, and exploration of sentimentalism in film is highlighted as part of such constructions. V. F. Perkins in *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, suggests that sentimentalism in film is a "disproportion between pathos asserted (in music, say, or image or gesture) and pathos achieved, in the action" (Perkins, 1993: 132). Perkins explains that a distinction should be made between a film's ability to produce emotion through action from the movie space, and bleakness that is elicited through music and imagery in film.

Ashley Reed and Jennifer Williamson in their book *The Sentimental Mode: Essays in Literature, Film and Television* explore sentimentalism in a contemporary context by noting that it should not merely be interpreted through various means, and that sentimentalism is not simply "narrative structure, common tropes, and rhetorical moves. [Rather, it is] an examination of 'self-in-society' and instructional emotional identification" (Reed and Williamson, 2014: 2). Charles Burnetts too takes a contemporary approach to understanding sentimentality in *Improving Passions: Sentimental Aesthetics and American Film*, positing that sentimentality can be viewed as "both a mode of narration and a representationalist philosophy; a problem negotiated with particular power and sophistication" (Burnetts, 2017: 4). He adds that this can be understood through films with "distinct affective appeals" (ibid.). The scholars above imply that sentimentalism (especially in a contemporary context) is rooted in cultural subtexts. Hence, in film, diegesis through action within the movie space provides a read on *the self* as a means through which sympathy can be generated for *the other*. "The affective self" as Felicity Colman describes it, "is a concept that many storytellers […] engage, often as a plot device, where there occurs a process of becoming something other through a realisation of the

qualitative construction of self-consciousness (Colman, 2010: 545–546). The *affective self* is therefore rooted in cognition which encourages an exploration into philosophical, sociological, and cultural questions.

The cultural form of sentimentalism is echoed in Greg Smith's conceptions of emotion. In Chapter 2.3.1, the thesis highlighted Smith's social constructivist theories of emotion which states that "cultural forces are not merely overlaid onto more essential biological foundations of the emotions […]. Instead, […] emotions cannot be understood outside of culture and the shaping forces of society" (Smith, 2003: 18). Additionally, "the rules of emotion are learned through socialisation, which guides us toward a preferred set of responses" (ibid.). Hence, concepts such as sentimentalism raise a lot of issues when considered not just outside of its cultural context, but in how social issues such as class struggle, poverty and racism are addressed even within one culture.

Plantinga raises the semantic questions surrounding sentimentality and considers utilising *sentimental emotions* as a more appropriate way of exploring sympathetic narratives. One of the issues with sentimentality, he notes, could stem from "a distorted concern-based construal that is either wilfully or unknowingly allowed for the sake of indulging the sentimental emotions" (Plantinga, 2009: 193). Plantinga points out though that "sentimentality in fiction does not misrepresent actual persons but may be thought instead to promote irrational habits of thought and response" (Plantinga, 2009: 194). As he explains, this is because sentimentality "simplifies and exaggerates good and encourages self-righteousness" (Plantinga, 2009: 194) so that the viewers' perception of *the self* is distorted.

In this thesis, sentimentality is approached more favourably but only on the condition that film formalism is able to emphasise aesthetic and formal elements (such as the use of colour, lighting, jump cuts, visually striking composition and shadow) in the narrative and in the movie space in which the character exists. Such elements must convey mood, emotion, symbolism, and visual metaphor. Hence, observing the object of sentimental emotions (film character) through formalist provisions (visual imagery, symbolism, music, sound) encourages perception and cognition because the audience is able to unfold context and make sense of visual and auditory information (again, through the formal elements that convey mood and emotion). For example, in order for a film character to evoke sentimental emotion in the audience, there must exist visual cues that show that the characters themselves are embodying sympathetic emotions that in turn evoke concern in the audience.

Williamson, like Plantinga acknowledges the issues surrounding in *Twentieth-Century Sentimentalism: Narrative Appropriation in American Literature*. She explains that contemporary criticism of sentimentalism views the notion as an "outdated mode" of appealing

to the viewer (Williamson, 2013: 1). She asserts that such criticisms are rooted in the argument that "sentimentalism portrays emotion that lacks reality or depth, falling flat in its attempts to depict real life and achieving only feminine melodrama" (ibid.). Williamson points out however, that as long as there are groups of people who exist on the margins of society, then depictions of such in the text will always elicit sympathy. Moreover, the duality of sentimentalism ensures not only its ability to promote social struggles, but its ability to:

> […] extend identification across them, makes it an attractive and effective mode for engaging with political issues and extending social influence. Common sentimental themes such as vulnerable womanhood, motherhood and familial responsibility, caregiving and domesticity, death and the fear of separation, and Christian salvation to establish sympathy for Othered members. (Williamson, 2013: 2).

Felicity Colman in *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies,* highlights the *affective self* which she suggests can be considered through critical theory and cultural norms. Hence, "the affect of the self upon itself provides the catalytic point for thought and for actions, under the factors of genetic information, pressure, circumstance, and situations" (Colman, 2010: 544). This echoes the discussion in Chapter 4.2.3 about "innate" and "learned" (Tomkins, 2008: 135) affect programmes/program activators. In Colman's variation of this concept through feminist theory, she also highlights the way affect in film is informed by these two principles. The notion of sentimentalism can therefore be understood through these principles. The thesis will now explore how sentimentality functions in film, and how the sentimental emotions and themes—such as those posited by Williamson—are conveyed through film form in *Black Swan* (2010) and *Mother!* (2017).

In general, if the audience observes a screen character as having sentimental value and/or embodying sentimentalism (by feelings such as pity, admiration, and shame), then such performance will need to evoke sympathetic emotions in the audience through cognition and perception. In other words, the object of the concern/sympathy must embody such emotions in order to allow the audience to critically understand style as well as themes (such as forgiveness, revenge and passion), and such themes are best understood within the film's context, through formalism. To summarise, sentimentalism in this thesis refers to the way storytelling is used to elicit emotional responses from the audience. It accounts for: (a) the recognition of the manipulation of filmic emotion—through narrative/formal devices); (b) moral themes— through vulnerability, sacrifice, love, friendship and resilience/triumph; (c) perception and cognition—through audience engagement with visual and auditory information and (d) resolution—through an eventual evocation of catharsis in the audience, having had their beliefs affirmed, emotional conflicts within the film resolved, or simply the provision of hope or inspiration in the film.

8.1. *Black Swan* (2010)

Black Swan is a 2010 *specialty* [2]film by Darren Aronofsky and distributed by Fox Searchlight Studios. (The studio's name was changed to Searchlight Pictures in 2019 after Disney's acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019 [Vary, 2020]). (The subject of specialty films and the specialty label has already been covered in chapters 1 and 2.1.2). *Black Swan* follows Nina, a ballerina who lives with her controlling mother. When the director of the ballet company Thomas, decides to recast for Swan Lake, Nina is his first choice. As she begins to rehearse for her big performance, Nina must get in touch with her most inner emotions in order to deliver the performance of a lifetime. The film is multi-layered in its approach to socio-cultural and philosophical commentary. Through its themes, the film is able to utilise metaphor in a way that is grounded in elements of formality and organisation. Hence, the frame creates mise-en-scène that prompts both haunting and beautiful undertones in its themes.

The film uses the composition within the frame to create meaning through the shots, colour, design, acting and editing. In the opening scene for example, *Black Swan* utilises lighting to foreshadow Nina's fate, but also to set the mood of the film. The scene employs an extreme use of both light and shadow concentrated in the frame, with Nina as the subject of the lighting, appearing between both. The frame thence creates a subjective state with visual metaphors for the audience. For one, it reveals Nina as a character who is stuck between light and darkness, but also emphasises that she embodies light (as she spots a white ballet costume). The set-up also highlights the significance of time and space of what *is* (Nina existing in the present moment as a meek, fragile, and innocent character), and what *should* be (Nina's goal of attaining balance between innocence and inner awakening), and the ultimate consequence in the undertaking of such a path which is death (Nina walking towards the light). This technique creates character identification in the audience from the onset of the film; the audience is provided with the formalist provisions that facilitates sympathy (as touched on in chapters 4.2.1 and 6.1 [Smith, 2022: 73]) for Nina as her perceived vulnerability and innocence make her appear as a character that the audience can recognise and align with.

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[2] In an independent film context, a specialty film is produced outside of the major studio system (although it generally depends on major studios financially, albeit at a lower budget, in comparison to mainstream commercial films). Specialty films also focus on artistic vision through character development, storytelling, and innovative film narratives, rather than commercial output.

Figure 8.1.1 – Foreshadowing through lighting

Black Swan can be understood as a character's descent into psychosis—highlighted through the film's mise-en-scène—which is brought on by the overwhelming desire to escape from the confines of innocence. Jim Piper (*The Film Appreciation Book: The Film Course You Always Wanted to Take*) argues that a conscious effort in observing symbolism in film, ensures that the audience is able to have a well-rounded emotional experience of film through such methods of meaning-finding. Hence, symbolism within a film is derived through "meticulous composition, meaningful props, mood-making lighting, and revealing details" (Piper, 2014: 364). He also underscores the importance of colour and texture in film scenes as a means of deriving meaning. At home, Nina is saddled with an overbearing mother, hence dance presents itself as an escape for her. However, her yearn for perfection in her dance performance presents real problems for Nina as she begins to fall apart, both mentally (hallucinating) and physically (bodily injuries).

The character of Thomas serves as a catalyst of Nina's mental state, and he is used in the film as a motif—and in a way that supports the themes of the film. While the dancers are auditioning for the new role of swan queen, Thomas recalls the story behind Swan Lake:

> We all know this story of the virginal girl, trapped in the body of a swan. She desires freedom but only true love can break the spell in the form of the prince. Before he can declare his love, the lustful twin, the black swan, tricks and seduces him. Devastated, she leaps off the cliff, killing herself and in death, finds freedom. Done to death, I know, but not like this. We strip it down, make it visceral and real.

Thomas therefore inadvertently highlights some of the themes of the film. The feeling of being trapped in the body of the (white) swan represents childlike repression while the desire for freedom represents adulthood. However, it is only possible through experiencing maturity by embracing new experiences (the prince). Unfortunately, before the swan queen (Nina) can achieve self-awareness (the prince's love), her dark side and desires (the black swan) takes over her life (through trickery and seduction). The swan queen/Nina, now overwhelmed as a result, stabs herself (leaps off a cliff) thereby killing herself; and in her physical death (and possibly metaphoric death of the *old self*), she experiences a renewed sense of self (finds

freedom). Thus, Thomas' calling to mind of the story provides foreshadowing to the audience—through exposition—of Nina's journey from that moment forward.

Thomas' dominant presence in Nina's life as she tries to work towards her performance plays the important role of enhancing the narrative and thematic elements in the film. In one scene, Thomas, in conversation with Nina, talks about Beth (the previous dancer who played the role of the swan queen). He says, "I guess that is what makes her [Beth] thrilling to watch. So dangerous, even perfect at times". In another scene, Thomas expresses his frustrations with Nina: "I see you obsessed, getting each and every move perfectly, but I never see you lose yourself". Thomas' commentary constantly highlights Nina's character as one who lives her life never being in touch with her visceral emotions. His opinions of Nina further heighten her efforts of achieving release, including pushing her to strive for perfection which she attempts in different ways, including an exploration of sexual desire. At the end scene of the film when Nina is lying on the mattress, she tells Thomas that she (her performance) was perfect. This underscores the character of Nina: one who lives life, having never been in touch with her visceral and real emotions. Hence, she fakes passion in her performance which reveals her inability to embody freedom as she clings to the desire for perfection at the expense of personal growth.

Yet, Nina's innocence and fragility makes her a character to be identified with. This is reiterated in the pink motif in several scenes leading up to her deteriorating mental health, but also in her execution of the role as the white swan (whose essence she is able to capture perfectly) while she experiences difficulty in executing the role of the black swan. She is presented as an othered member of society, and her experience of hallucinations reveal moments that further isolates her. (During rehearsals, she is often seen alone and away from the other dancers and when she goes to and from rehearsals, she often travels alone. Nina also experiences her hallucinations alone and not while in the company of others). Hence, the *duality of sentimentalism* (highlighted at the start of this chapter) is made available in this film, both in its suggestions of social struggles as well as in its themes of "vulnerable womanhood" and "fear of separation" (Williamson, 2013: 2) brought on by a need to fit into societal standards of perfection.

When Nina befriends Lily, she begins to get more in touch with her *dark* side. With her desire for passion, perfection, and freedom, she is soon transformed into the black swan. This progression is observed through the film's formalist style and use of colour and costume. The pink motif, as previously stated, is initially used in the film but the colours of her clothing change drastically throughout the film. She initially wears pink and white, which symbolises her innocence and purity. Her clothing soon changes, and she begins wearing grey clothing

when she begins to explore her sexuality. The neutrality of the colour pattern signifies Nina's inner battle with self-awakening. This means that her encounter with her *shadow self*, reveals truths that she is not equipped to deal with and therefore, there is a perceived sense of desperation to either adapt to her new self or revert to her old self. When she grows increasingly close to Lily and accompanies her to a nightclub, she wears black and darker clothes. This signifies that she is transforming from child-like innocence to maturity (the black swan), but it also symbolises the worsening of her mental state.

The film's utilisation of visual representation of the self to elicit meaning is highlighted throughout the film. The use of a mirror image of Nina that often causes her fear and distress informs the audience that Nina has been battling with herself from the very beginning. But she does not realise this until the end of the film. Nina grows increasingly threatened by Lily and this comes to a climax at her dressing room. Her obsession and jealousy of Lily is rooted in Lily's ability to lose control and exude passion while she dances, while Nina herself is very uptight and controlled in her movements. In Nina's state of psychosis, she stabs Lily, but in actuality, she is alone and is battling with herself, both physically and mentally, and she stabs herself in the process. When it is revealed that she has in fact only imagined herself killing Lily, she gets ready to take the stage and hallucinates herself, fully transforming into the Black Swan. This signifies that death of child-like innocence which has been holding Nina back all along. It could also mean that all her efforts—captured throughout the film— at repressing her twin/second self has led her point to a point of self-destruction.

Figure 8.1.2 – Meaning through self-reflection

Black Swan depicts the emotional and psychological stress that unravels from a person who has no sense of self but has to conform to unachievable perfection. The film builds on audience identification through its running theme of the evolution of the black swan at the demise of the white swan. It achieves sentimentalism through eliciting sympathy for Nina's character. Therefore, the emotional journey that the audience experiences—one characterised by interest, shame, anger and fear—are heightened from an experience with *self*. That is, to find oneself, one needs to realise that they are indeed lost, and in order for the audience to

attribute sentimental emotion to Nina though identification. They must access the objects of sentiments and sentimental emotions, which in this case are concerns relating to *fear of separation* and the *vulnerability of womanhood*.

The film therefore utilises techniques that presents Nina's reality to create such sentimental emotions, as opposed to an insinuation of a reality that she might be experiencing. This enables the audience to maintain sympathy with what Nina is experiencing. When she stabs Lily, the body soon changes to her mirror image at which point Nina realises that she has stabbed herself. The utilisation of binary opposites (white and black swan) is merged in a linear fashion that leaves the audience questioning their own reality, since the formalist technique in the film allows the audience to experience a state of psychosis with Nina. The film ends with Nina dying on the mattress she leapt onto, at the end of her Swan Lake performance. Her obsession with perfection came at the price of her life.
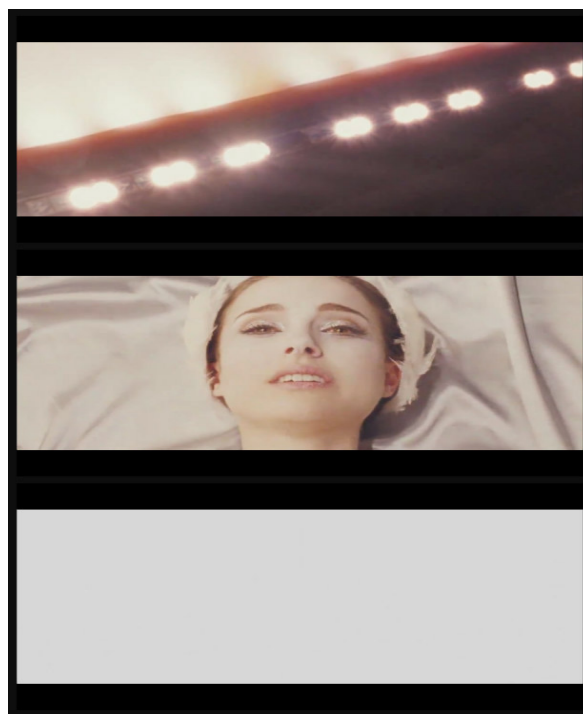

Figure 8.1.3 – The futility of perfection

The end scene lets the audience know that the film's narrative, is not only about the desire for perfection, but it is also a story about a girl finally transitioning to womanhood. As she lays on the mattress Nina says to Thomas, "I felt it, I was perfect" as she is looking up at the ceiling and at the stage. The screen fades into white as chants of her name can be heard from the crowd and the film credits roll. The end can be read in two ways: Nina is dying a physical death because she is *going towards the light*. She could also be dying a figurative death through the loss of innocence and fragility. In the latter sense, it could signal a changed and evolved Nina.

8.2. *Mother!* (2017)

Mother! is a 2017 film by Darren Anorofsky that tells the story of a writer and his wife who live in a secluded house. Their lives take a difficult turn, however, when Him (played by Javier Bardemgrows) grows increasingly keen on the validation from his fans. Him soon begins to invite guests to their home, much to Mother's displeasure. Their world gradually descends into chaos which culminates in an out-of-control crowd that becomes impossible to get rid of. The character of Mother (played by Jennifer Lawrence) is shown to be doting, meek and submissive and this is amplified through the close-up shots that draw attention to her gaze that seems to rest on her husband a lot of the time. Him, on the other hand, is shown to be distant, forceful and dominant and this is emphasised through the long and mid-shots that reveal his body language and his side profile when his attention is on his work. The shots also create a level of distance between the audience and Him, but not in a way that it disarms concern in the audience, but rather, in a way that it creates judgment of his character—rather than an identification with him. The element of mystery that exists in *Black Swan,* is also observed in *Mother!* Mystery breeds fear of the unknown and this fear is embodied by Mother (as is the case with the character of Nina).

Figure 8.1.4 – Close-up shot to symbolise benevolence

The film allows the audience to study Mother through the framing of the shots and such an exercise reveals her character to be a mere spectator to events in her own life that drastically changes around her. The lack of control that she experiences at any given moment allows the audience to feel sympathy for her because her helplessness creates vulnerability. This is especially so as Mother is often tasked with cleaning the very mess that she did not contribute to creating. For example, when the older son of Man kills his younger son, Man and Woman along with Him depart for the hospital, leaving Mother alone in the house to clean up the bloody floors. It also becomes increasingly clear that Mother never leaves the house, but there also seems to be a life (a part of her) trapped within the walls of the house (as visualised through the bleeding floors and pulsating walls). Mother is shown to have both a psychological and

physiological connection to many parts of the house that she is renovating. Hence, in many ways, the audience provided with the context that her entire existence and destiny is tied and restricted to the confines of the house. The film utilises dim lighting in the interior of the house, but the moment in which Mother is shown standing in front of the doorway of the house, reveals a picturesque exterior which raises questions in the audience about why she never leaves the house. It then signifies to the audience that there is a world that is beyond Mother's reach, even though she is in close proximity to said world. This connotation further amplifies the loneliness of her life.

Figure 8.1.5 – Picturesque exterior to denote an out-of-reach 'otherworld'

An important component in the film is in its utilisation of sound design. The absence of music, and the use of mostly diegetic sound helps to set the tone of the movie in a way that builds tension at every passing moment. This strategic use of music is reiterated by Bordwell in which he posits that when non-diegetic music is utilised in film, it "signals the narration's awareness of facing an audience, for the music exists solely for the spectator's benefit" (2019: 33). Hence by not acknowledging the audience on that level and creating a distance between the audience and the movie space, they are able to experience raw, visceral emotions that are presented on screen. Hence, unlike film scoring that "enters the system of narration" (Bordwell, 2019: 33), the use of diegetic sound enters the system of emotion and the formulation of meaning. The film also does not rely on jump scares in the gory scenes which makes for a more immersive experience. For example, the use of diegetic sound in the scene where Mother's baby is eaten by the mob serves to remove any suggestions other than the one created by the audience. Hence, *res ipsa loquitor* (the thing speaks for itself)—and no connotations needs to be made by the filmmaker about the scene—which allows the audience to observe and react to the horror without any sound cues to guide them towards such a reaction.

The character of Mother draws sympathy even further in the way she embodies sentimental themes of "womanhood", "domesticity", death" and "fear of separation", as

previously highlighted in this chapter by Williamson (2013: 2). The character of Him dismisses Mother's fears even though he uses her as his inspiration, muse, and creative self. In the moments in which Him dismisses Mother; his creativity is stifled. However, when he opens himself up to her emotions and provides her with significant attention, only then does he regain his creativity in writing. When the guests clamour for him after he regains some writing success, it reveals to the audience how much the validation of outsiders takes priority over Mother's feelings. When Him's editor shoots some of his guests in one scene, it signifies to the audience that his creative ideas are again, being killed by the very people he seeks validation from. The scene is also followed by some of the intruders in a cage in his house which also implies that his idea of what those people truly are needs to be locked away so that he can focus on what is of real importance in his life.

When Him's guests arrive at the house to commiserate with Man and Woman over the death of their son, they toast to him and thank him for his hospitality. This further amplifies the themes of sentimentality in the way that Mother is othered, dismissed and excluded by everyone around her. In one scene, Mother expresses her frustrations to Him and accuses him of only being in love with the idea of being in love. It reveals the fear of separation that she has been feeling throughout the events of the film. Her frustrations are showcased and reiterated by the fact that Him never tries to avoid the increasing chaos that the unwanted guests bring to their lives. When Woman asks the couple about having a child, Him dismisses the idea. Woman again, persuades Mother to have a child with Him after the death of her own son. In one scene, friction builds between the couple which ends in them having sex. This moment of release is captured with the use of soft and exposed lighting that fades into the screen. It suggests that for the first time in a long time, Mother is able to witness light (joy) in her life. A similar technique is also used when Mother gives birth which simultaneously serves as foreshadowing for the brief joy she was about to experience through the birth of her child.

Figure 8.1.6 – Pleasure and pain through exposed fade-in lighting

Allegory is one of the significant components to understanding the story and creating meaning in *Mother!* Allegory provides the audience with implicit meanings in the film that goes beyond its apparent connotations. Piper notes that "allegories are closer to metaphors than to symbols [because] they run through entire movies" (Piper, 2014: 361). He also highlights the major issues surrounding allegorical meanings in film, particularly that audiences often disagree with their meanings in film because they are often perceived to be "far-fetched and oddly personal". (ibid.). The allegory in *Mother!* as identified as a recounting of the stories in *The Bible*. It is arguably obvious in its suggestiveness, although this observation will depend on the religious sensibilities of the audience. The use of allegory thence invokes feelings of horror, anger and even a sense of righteousness in the viewer.

In Chapter 4.5.1, the thesis highlighted the use of allegory in *Midsommar* (2019) which are provided as a story within a story. A good allegory should therefore serve as a "figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another" (Piper, 2014: 361). Consequently, a film must provide its own meaning and the film elements utilised within the film's story then provides an avenue for a second story exteriorised within the film itself. But allegories should be offered as part of storytelling and not the point of it, otherwise it does not make for a coherent viewing experience because the emotions offered are not informed by the sensibilities the film purports to activate since it is not immediately deducible to the audience, which can take them away from the main story and build frustration in the audience. Additionally, the meaning made available by way of structural allegories are only achieved after the viewing experience, and not during. This is because no motifs are offered in the film to assist with such allegoric interpretations. The use of characters as motif (the sons as Cain and Abel; Man and Woman as Adam and Eve) provide no meaning without the initial schemata available to the audience. This is because no strategic film techniques accompany such motifs, they are simply presented to the audience as a point of the narrative. In *Sex Lies and Videotape* for example, when Ana is speaking about how to deal with *garbage*, her conversation cuts to Graham at the gas station getting rid of his old belongings. This technique infers in the audience that Graham is the answer to her life problems and positions/foreshadows his character as central to achieving her goals and solving her problems. There must therefore be film techniques that allows for metaphoric and allegoric interpretations.

As part of his *good combination theory-approach* to examining the way emotion is offered in film, Greg Smith argues that:

> A good approach to filmic emotions should be able to explain not only why a film succeeds in eliciting emotions but also why another film fails to do so. […]. If the [theoretical] approach cannot explain why certain narrative structures are less effective in cuing emotion, then it is too broad to provide specific insight into effective film structure. (Greg Smith, 2003: 8)

In *Mother!,* although the film's affective construction of emotion allows for the sentimental emotions experienced during the film to build, there is no provision of relief offered to the audience by way of immediate, deducible meaning, because the allegory is presented at the point of the unfolding events. It almost removes the power of the characters as agents of causality since there is a presence of a god-like entity (the filmmaker) within the presence of God (Him). This approach could be seen as an attempt of criticism of theology in which Anorofsky positions God as worthy of judgement: as a capricious entity who is worthy of questioning—particularly with regards to omnipresence and omniscience—and how such god-like qualities contradict the concept of an "all good" and "all loving" deity. But the allegoric meaning overtakes what should be the primary story at the climax of the movie so that even such meanings established by that point of the movie is partly diminished. The chaos and confusion that ensues as unwanted guest pour into the house is indeed a metaphor for the audience's understanding of the story.

Another instance of allegory overlapping symbolism is through the meaning created by events as they unfold. In *Midsommar*, the feeling of helplessness was mentioned which was examined through the film's use of metafiction as a way to elicit this emotion. In *Mother!* however, the emotions elicited by the film are brought on by the events that unfold. It is clear to the audience that Mother is stuck in the house, but also an awareness of present alienation as her deepest emotions are experienced alone: Whether from fright from noises that only she can seemingly hear, or from sadness as she suffers neglect from Him. But there is also a sense of helplessness elicited by such performances which comes to a head when guests begin to enter the house uninvited. The film is able to elicit feelings of anxiety and helplessness because of the imbalance in Mother and Him's relationship: Him is presented as a narcissist while mother is presented as being hopelessly in love with him. This is amplified by Him's selfishness and need for outside validation which elicits further discomfort in the audience because the more of it he gets, the more Mother suffers isolation.

The gory scene in the film also could be read as criticism of religious practices of the Holy Communion and the concept of Transubstantiation. The concept of transubstantiation in Catholicism is based on the notion that the symbolic bread and wine used during the sacrament of Holy Communion (to signify the last supper of Jesus Christ) are in themselves—during the consecration ceremony—transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus. The practice relies on the premise that the bread and wine shared are not symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus, rather, that they are in themselves his body and blood. Hence, the scene in which the crowd cannibalises Mother's baby can be seen as a critic of the belief in such a doctrine. This provision of criticism then enables the audience to perceive the scene, not as dark and twisted

in itself (although perhaps in its meaning) but as symbolic of Jesus' crucifixion. The scene could also signify the consequence of Him's obsession with the fame from his work and his eagerness to show it off to his fans only for his *work* to be *picked apart* (cannibalised) and destroyed by the very people who initially embraced him.

Allegoric connotations on the Old Testament are spread around the story in the film. Him holds high reverence for his office where he keeps a crystal he cherishes. When Him tells Man and Woman to never go into his office, it can be interpreted to mean that God (Him) is instructing Adam and Eve (Man and Woman) against going to parts of the garden of Eden (his office) to eat (touch) from the tree of good and evil (his crystal). When Man and Woman disobey Him by breaking his crystal (eating the forbidden fruit), Him angrily admonishes them, sends them away from his office and barricades the doors, implying the banishment from the Garden of Eden. Another Old Testament allegory is highlighted in the scene in which some of the guests in the couple's home (who arrive for the wake of the younger son of Man) break the sink and cause water damage after which Him tells his guests to leave. This can be read as representing the story of the Great Flood and Noah's ark. When some of the guests return to the house later in the film, it can be taken to mean that the returning guests are the survivors of the flood (especially since Man and Woman never return to the house).

Mother! also provides the audience with other meanings that are other than those that appeal to religious sensibilities. The events of the film can be read as commentary on the relationship humans have with their environment. When the baby is killed Mother descends into a state of rage and begins killing people. This can be interpreted as symbolising nature's natural disasters. The crowd which also attacks Mother can also represent how humans ignore nature's disasters and persist on damaging it. After Mother is attacked by the crowd, Him pleads with her to forgive them and tries to assure her that they are ready to change. It symbolises, perhaps, God's hope for humanity's penance. However, since humans continue to repeat their crimes against Mother (the earth and her resources) she blows up the house with herself and the crowd in it which has connotations of the Apocalypse. The environmental criticism in the reading of these scenes is highlighted in the way that humans idolise Man while treating Mother (Earth) in a discourteous manner by tearing her apart and damaging her. Hence, at the end of the film, God is renewed as a consequence of man's actions and is able to start over again. Humans do not seem to ever learn, and they therefore continue to repeat the same mistakes.

The emotions elicited in the film as well as the themes of sentimentalism are primarily guided by Mother. The audience is not afforded forethought; hence, revelations are made to the audience at the same time that they are made to Mother. This means that there is a sense of

sameness in the emotions that mother experiences with that of the audience as she navigates through her confusing life, even when she is often distracted by occurrences around the house that capture her interest, from the pulsating walls to tending to the unwanted guests. *Mother!* utilises foreshadowing at the beginning of the film, but the audience only becomes aware of this at the end of the film.

Figure 8.1.7 – Foreshadowing: A new end

When Mother sets herself on fire, the ending sequence, juxtaposed with the beginning sequence shows that the new Mother is more bloodied as she is engulfed by the fire. This signifies to the audience that the death of the Mother respawn at the end of the film will be even more gruesome than the current Mother's. It signifies that the time loop that plagues this horror mansion is not only repetitive but increasingly dangerous for the Mother it spawns. This is because the Mother characters get more benevolent with every new sequence within the loop and father becomes more malevolent and distant, because the former character is only just achieving a new consciousness and the latter's consciousness has been present since the time of the first Mother, whomever that may have been.

8.3. Conclusion

Chapter 8 has examined the notion of sentimentalism in films directed by Darren Aronofsky. The chapter started off by proposing important arguments surrounding sentimentalism, particularly in relation to contemporary connotations. The issues surrounding the use of sentimentality in film to elicit meaning was also discussed. What this chapter has attempted to do is explore notions that might enable the audience to create meaning through an understanding of social, cultural and ethical contexts of film, and in relation to the emotional experience they offer. Like many of the films explored in Chapter 4, *Black Swan*'s sentimental

value is in the understanding of *the self* (affective programming) and engaging with the text (through its form and screen characters). Consequently, the film's propensity for sentimentality is valued though the implication that ethical judgement (and an understanding of one's actions) is the highest form of thinking about the world. Concern-based emotions then serves a cognitive function for the audience by questioning *the self* and in so doing, questioning *the other* (within the action space), to arrive at an ethical judgement. *Black Swan*'s sentimentalism is therefore derived through "the transformative limbic of the aesthetic" and through "human nature and psychology" (Bell, 2012: 11). Sentimental emotions are therefore intensified by identification through "the category of the aesthetic" (Bell, 2012: 13) by way of formalism.

In *Mother!*, the concern-based construal of emotion is rooted in a curative function in a way that affirms the transcendence of vulnerability in the face of danger. The affirmation of helplessness takes root only after an evocation of the isolation of the pain and suffering that comes with intense love (from Mother) in the midst of neglect (from Him). The moments where we are able to identify sentimental emotions in *Black Swan* are not reliant on manipulated form, such as close-up shots. Rather, it is derived from Nina's experience with self—and *shadow* self (see Fig. 8.1.2)—and such identification is created through her innocence and fragility through her experience. *Mother!* utilises closeup shots (Fig. 9.1.4) as a way of establishing the "universally cinematic language" (Burnett, 2017: 59) of sentimentalism. Hence, since such sentimental emotions are not from Mother's experience/discovery of the self, the elicited emotions therefore become too *obvious* and "readerly" (ibid.). It therefore buttresses the issue raised at the beginning of this chapter with Smith noting that sentimental emotion "through socialisation [...] guides us toward a preferred set of responses" (Smith, 2003: 18). The predetermined construction of sentimental emotion in *Mother!* therefore creates what Burnetts refers to as "the passivity of cinematic spectatorship" (Burnett, 2017: 59) that is often produced by Hollywood cinema's "lack of real consideration of problems, artistic, or sociological" (Burnett, 2017: 59). The audience, however, experiences those emotions, despite its orientation, and this is made possible by the hard-to-educate *pleasure principle* (Freud, 2015: 9), as discussed in Chapter 4.3. Hence, some sentimental emotions may pose issues in certain contexts. As the pleasure principle would suggest, and as Burnetts equally argues, emotions sometimes exist in conflict with "intellectual engagement" (Burnetts, 2017: 59) in film. Mainstream cinema thus has the tendency to capitulate to the conventional notion of "sentimental foregrounding" (ibid.) on socio-cultural and ethical subjects.

Sentimentality evoked in cinema then becomes a question of the recognition of the natural self and the text; going back to Tomkin's affective programmes which include innate and learned affect program activators (Tomkins, 2008: 135). In *Black Swan*, the identification

the audience has to the character of Nina is heightened by her spiralling mental state. The audience can actively witness the deterioration of her mental health through visual representations (in the same way that the audience is able to experience Dani's hallucinations in *Midsommar*). In *Mother!* sentimental emotion is purely based on the audience's response to Mother's treatment in the story. There are no implicit meanings of her embodied emotions as it is dictated to the audience through the isolation that is thrust upon her on screen. Since such emotions do not come from an experience with the self, the audience assumes passivity in the story, in order to give way for the ever-unfolding chaos within the action space. There is no provision of an invitation into the action space because the audience is not invited to relate to such space or identify with the action within the space. The moments which elicit sentimental emotion are therefore based on the treatment of Mother's within the story and not through an observed recognition of the self.

Arguably, *Black Swan* ensures that the audience maintains an active role in making meaning in the film due to affective and formalist connotations that transforms the audience in ways that also prompts them "exert a significant influence upon the social sphere within which [they] interact" (Burnetts, 2017: 54). *Mother!* reflects the ideological criticism of sentimentalism; one that "ignores the [audience] as an active maker of meaning" (Burnetts, 2017: 143). Indeed, both films encourage the audience's experience of sympathy through compassion, surprise, discomfort and sadness for characters that do experience difficulties in their lives. However, the way is which sentimental emotions are provided in both films is rooted in the role of the audience in the story. The film that requires the audience to be active makers of meaning also primarily relies on innate affective responses in the audience. The active makers of meaning must utilise such affective programmes to exert an interventionist role by transforming ethically and/or politically within the filmic context. Thus, the active viewers in *Black Swan* employ intellectual engagement in order to assert dominance through understanding the self and the text.

The film that requires the audience to be passive observers of film form relies on learned affective generators that modifies their affective programmes through engaging with formal components in the film. Since the complacent audience does not necessarily require an engagement with the self—and therefore a cognitive engagement with the text—they are not required to alter their consciousness in order to experience sentimental emotions. Thus, the passive viewers in *Mother!* employ *formal feedback* (through the formal components in the film as a means of *learning* how to engage) as a means of understanding the text. Character identification in *Black Swan* is therefore born from a study of the internal struggles with the self while in *Mother!* the invocation of sympathy is rooted in the way Mother is treated by

others (because the audience's sentimental emotions towards Mother is *manipulated/organised* through film form), but also in how her character is framed on screen. Through an invocation of passivity in *Mother!* the audience precludes every affirmative possibly of innate affective programming (and therefore an intellectual engagement with the idea of sentimentalism), even though such sentimental responses and emotions are valuable to the audience's experience of sentimentalism in film.

CHAPTER NINE: THESIS CONCLUSION|

9.1. Key Findings

The thesis thus far has attempted to create a pathway through which the concepts of emotion and affect can be theorised in cinema, and in a way that answers the key question about the identity of independent cinema through filmmaking practices. Through an exploration of ideology in film narratives the thesis has examined the manifestation of emotion through emotional engagement, emotional sustainability, sentimentality in key films. Key findings are illustrated below:

	Independent Films	Hollywood Films
1	Emotion is primarily affective	Emotion is primarily narrative
2	Utilises affective film characters	Utilises affective film events
3	Emotional engagement with the story can be sustained with a passive main character	Emotional engagement requires an active main character for emotional sustainability
4	Emotional sustainability may occur when several passive characters or one active character generates active viewers	Emotional sustainability may occur when one or several active characters or an affective event generates passive viewers
5	Sentimental emotions require affective characters	Sentimental emotion utilises affective events

Table 9.1 – Key findings

Before clarifying the key findings in the above table, it is important to first restate the definitions of active and passive viewers, which can simply be understood as *thinking* audiences and *feeling* audiences, respectively. The thesis has used both terms extensively when analysing various film texts. (For example, chapters such as 2.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.6; 7.3 and 8.3 show how audiences can assume activity or passivity based on the formal techniques and element employed by the filmmaker in a film's narrative. To reiterate, where the film narrative permits, the viewer will become actively engaged with the film, to the extent, in some cases, that they are invited into the movie space (such as when a film utilises extreme close-up shots or low camera angles). As the active audience can engage closely with film form, it influences their attention, sustains interest, builds perception and cognition, and calls on the audience to make moral judgement of characters and themes. Active viewers are also able to identify metaphors, motifs, symbolisms, and other layers of meaning through critical engagement with film texts. On the other hand, passive viewers are less engaged with the film's structure and deeper meaning. When audiences are passive it is either one or two things: (1) the film's form (through

spectacle and visual effects) does not require an active audience and/or the structure of the film does not require the audience to assume activity; (2) it is by the filmmaker's design that the audience is simply required to feel, in the moment, rather than to think deeply about the structure of the narrative. Hence, the audience can switch between *activity* and *passivity* over the course of a film, depending on the active/passive configurations on screen by way of characters and events. Additionally, depending on the deliberate construction of emotions in the narrative by the filmmaker, the audience can engage emotionally with the story, sustain emotion of the narrative, and elicit certain emotions (such as sentimental emotion) based on such constructions.

The thesis now clarifies the key findings in Table 9.1. Firstly, emotion in indie films is primarily affective due to its ability to evoke both immediate and gradual visceral responses from the audience. Affective film emotion can be found rooted in the audience's embodied experience, engaging not only cognitive processes but also bodily sensations, feelings, and emotional states. In the analysis of *Black Swan* in Chapter 8.1, the reader will recall that artistic director Thomas—in speaking about 'Swan Lake'— talks about his intention to strip the story down and "make it visceral and real". The film indirectly calls on the audience to deeply engage with its characters through emotion. The embodied responses of affective film emotion are integral to the affective experience of film, as they reflect the audience's engagement with film form and emotional content.

Emotion in Hollywood films is primarily narrative due to its close relationship with the storytelling elements and structure of a film. Narrative aspects such as plot development, character arcs, thematic content, and symbolic imagery all contribute to the emotional experience of the audience. With affective film emotion, the audience is able to empathise with characters and become emotionally invested in their own experiences with emotion. For example, the audience is able to observe and immerse themselves in the emotional depth and complexity of the characters of Ann in *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, John in *John Q.* and Nina in *Black Swan*. Thus, components such as storytelling and performance are utilised by the filmmakers to elicit empathy and identification, allowing viewers to vicariously experience the emotions depicted on screen. With narrative film emotion, however, emotional engagement as experienced in Hollywood films often stems from the audience's investment in the film characters and their journeys. Through the narrative development of characters—such as their motivations, conflicts, growth, and relationships—the audience develops emotional connections and empathises with their experiences. In other words, the identification with a film character through narrative emotion is based on tracking the life events/journey of the

character while identification through affective emotion tracks the character's embodied responses at any given moment in the film, which the audience then absorbs.

Secondly, indie films utilise affective film characters. An affective film character is one that elicits strong emotional responses from the audience due to their compelling portrayal, complexity, and relatability. An affective film event, on the other hand, is a pivotal moment or sequence in the film that evokes strong emotional reactions from viewers. When film characters are affective, they usually engage the audience through their compelling performance which often captures the subtleties of human emotion, allowing the audience to empathise or identify with their experiences and struggles. When film events are affective, they can be understood through their emotional intensity, which elicit powerful feelings (such as joy, sadness, fear, or awe). It could be a climactic showdown (pandemic in *Contagion*), a traumatic event (child sacrifice in *Mother!)* or a devastating loss (death due to cancer in *My Sister's Keeper*). The affective event deeply drives story to create meaning and engage the audience emotionally. Both configurations of affect in film play crucial roles in how the audience interprets film texts.

Thirdly, in indie films, emotional engagement with the story can be sustained with a passive main character. This is because—as highlighted while expanding on the first finding— affective emotion affords the audience the space to observe/track the character's embodied emotion and mood. It would be of no significance to the narrative for the character to drive the plot of the film because the audience's focus is on the character and their felt bodily states; and they serve as the purpose for the film plot not to influence it. (For example, Ann in *Sex, Lies and Videotape* could spend the entire film in her therapist's office and through dialogue, her disposition, and the use of film techniques and formal elements such as framing, camera angles and sound design, the audience would arguably sustain emotional engagement with her character. Through dialogue, the audience would be able to track/observe Ann's experience of emotion through her vulnerabilities, her views about life, her personal struggles and the ways in which her emotions reveal truths about the *self*.

==Conversely==, emotional engagement in Hollywood films requires an active main character. This is because narrative emotion compels the audience to follow the journey of the character in order to identify with the character through plot and structure and narrative arcs. (For example, like Ann, Mother is an equally meek and vulnerable character. However, emotion could not be sustained in *Mother!* if Mother were to be sat with Father all day whilst he actively ignored her. This is because her character would not be able to develop in such a configuration. Hence, there must exist, something bigger than herself—an event (the constant home intrusions and invasions), within the narrative structure to cause her to maintain activity (such as renovating the house, cleaning the house or running scared through the house). Even

as she remains seemingly trapped in such a confined space/interior, Mother must maintain action because it is the only way to drive the plot, develop her character through her journey and ultimately sustain emotional engagement.

The fourth finding proposes that emotional sustainability in indie films may occur when several passive characters or one active character generates active viewers. The reader will recall that in Chapter 7, it was noted that three key aspects of emotional sustainability in film includes consistency of emotional tone and mood, narrative pacing and structure, as well as character development (in terms of a film character's emotional experiences, motivations, and inner conflicts). The third attribute of emotional sustainability in this thesis (character development) is thus, partly reflected in the fourth key finding. By following the affective emotional experience (rather than the emotional experience of the narrative) of the active characters of John in *John Q,* Ann in *Sex, Lies and Videotape* and Nina in *Black Swan*—all of whom possess clear motivations and desires that propel them to eventually take action and shape the course of the narrative—the audience's interest and emotional investment is sustained throughout the film. Since the audience's interest remains constant through the course of the narrative in this schema, the audience is able to actively analyse storytelling, themes and character emotions while also observing the layers of meaning within the films through their utilisation of formal elements such as framing.

Equally, passive characters in the above films—or characters who assume passivity within the filmic space—can also generate active viewers. The second attribute of emotional sustainability in this thesis (narrative pacing and structure) is partly reflected in this notion. Through realism, narrative pacing can be engineered through authentic/heartfelt character performance and realistic dialogue by or with passive characters. This is because such realism of emotional experience through performance and dialogue can build tension, suspense, or emotional resonance, gradually, which sustains the audience's interest, empathy, and anticipation. By following the performance and dialogue of passive characters and/or characters who at any point during the film narrative, assume passivity in the action space, the audience is equally able to actively analyse emotional depth and complexity in the storytelling, moral dilemmas, and existential questions within the narrative which sustain audience interest, emotional engagement and cognition by provoking thought, introspection, and empathy.

Conversely on the fourth finding, emotional sustainability in Hollywood films may occur when one or several active characters, or an affective event, generates passive viewers. Since emotion is primarily narrative in Hollywood films, as mentioned earlier, the audience's primary focus and experience of emotion, is on/through the characters' journey or life events in the story. The reader will also recall that in Chapter 7.3, it was explained that emotion is sustained

in film when there is consistency in tone and mood. The presence of active characters or an affective event means that the audience assumes inactivity/passivity as the combination of one or several active characters and an affective event means that the audience inadvertently focusses on the cause for activity within the movie space (an event). In their passive state, thence, the audience is able to sustain emotion by focusing on cause (affective event) and how the characters journey through the event, rather than the effect of such *affectiveness* (the characters' embodied emotions).

The methodology that leads to the key findings in the table above began with the exploration of 'Emotional Engagement' in film. Chapter 6 explained how an identification with narrative characters is established in film. The scholarly works cited in the chapter (such as [Smith, 2022]; [Smith, 2003], and [Plantinga, 2009]) laid the groundwork for such explorations. The chapter noted that the affective state created by an engagement with film form is rooted in the character-driven narrative (in *Sex, Lies and Videotape*) and the event-driven narrative (in *Contagion*). Hence, emotional engagement through identification is dependent on the function of the screen character in the narrative. Emotion in the independent film is therefore *affective* since film style elicits affective states/meaning which are made available to the active maker of meaning (the audience). In the Hollywood film, emotion is narrative since emotion is derived from an engagement with narrative and is driven by the active character experience of the movie world.

Chapter 7 discussed 'Emotional Sustainability' by establishing filmic mood through film form and affective characters as vehicles for emotional sustainability. The chapter cited several scholars (including [Henderson, 1983] and [Freud, 2015]) to establish theoretical notions of emotion and mood in film. It then explained that emotional sustainability in film analysis would account for: (a) the consistency in emotional tone and film mood in the film narrative; (b) the pacing of the narrative structure in to sustain mood and maintain emotional engagement; (c) the film's portrayal of character development to help in sustaining audience interest. In the case of *John Q.*, the character of John functions as an active character within the character-driven narrative. Hence, while he assumes *activity* in the story as the agent of causality, John as an affective character is able to sustain specific moods in the film because his *activity* as a character is framed in the world of the event that he has created. Consequently, the event itself does not sustain the mood in the film, but John's navigation through his world does. His embodied emotion is therefore equally elicited in the audience: The audience feels frustration in times that John does, and when such embodied perturbations are not directly implied in the film (in moments when film form replaces his outward expressions of emotion) such moods are still sustained through film form. (For example, the use of montage editing to show John

and Denise being given the run-around as they try to find financial aid from various institutions and programmes).

In *My Sister's Keeper*, narrative power is granted to several affective characters in the film. Since several active characters are reacting to an event, the focus then shifts to the object of such emotions which, in *My Sister's Keeper*, is Kate as the agent of change (creator or event) in the characters' lives. The thesis then made five claims relating to a film's ability to sustain emotion through the active/passive audience; the active/passive screen characters, and how the number of active/passive characters on screen influences the audience's viewer experience (either as active or passive). It noted that: (1) if there are several active screen characters, then emotional tone in narrative will become inconsistent; (2) if the formal elements adopted in the film is such that it affords the audience to be positioned as active viewers in film engagement, then mood and tone can be sustained in the viewing experience, if the film characters are passive in the story; (3) if specific emotions are to be sustained in film, then affect cannot also be embodied by several active characters on screen. As noted in Chapter 7.3, this is because when there are several active characters on screen then there is an affective/major event in the film that is causing them to assume activity; (4) the combination of active viewers and one active viewer can also help in achieving emotional sustainability; (5) mood and tone can also be maintained and sustained in storytelling if emotions are embodied by several passive characters in the film.7

Sentimentalism is explored in Chapter 8 by identifying notions of sentimentality, sentimentalism, and sentimental emotions (Williamson, [2013]; Bell, [2012], Burnett, [2017], Tomkins, [2008]). The notion of the affective self and the text are highlighted as major drivers of sentimentalism. In the case of *Mother!* the audience are passive observers of film form that relies on learned affective generators. Therefore, an engagement with the self (and thus a cognitive engagement with the text) is not required in the experience of sentimental emotions. The passive audience only need rely on formal feedback through an engagement with film form and active, affective characters. By invoking *activity* on the *Black Swan* audience through a study of the affective self, intellectual engagement with the affective characters then allows for the audience to experience sentimental emotion through a recognition of the personal struggles (and not by a recognition of manipulated/organised film form to suggest that such struggles exist) embodied in the screen character.

The three chapters mentioned above then provide very specific contexts for the five key findings listed in Table 9.1. It is important to note that the thesis does not theorise specific emotions and affects such as sadness, joy, anger, fear, disgust, suspense, and horror in film, it simply utilises the ideological notions in film narrative, covered in the three chapters to explore

how emotion and affect are made available to the viewing audience. The concepts of emotional engagement, emotional sustainability and sentimentalism therefore provide a pathway through which emotion and affect can be theorised in cinema. Independent and Hollywood films can then be defined in terms of their emotional and affective provisions in film through an identification of narrative characters, a recognition of filmic moods and affective characters and event. When such qualities are taken into account in textual analysis, it provides two distinctive set of functions (in Table 9.1) relating to the viewing audience and the action space.

9.2. Summary of Chapters

It was noted in the introductory chapter that the study of American independent cinema as well as concepts such as emotion and affect in relation to film are rather massive and complex projects. The subject of affect is particularly complex since it involves the brain, which, as Carl Plantinga notes, "is as yet only poorly and/or partially understood" (Plantinga, 2009: 221). The thesis therefore prioritised the text as the situation and manifestation of and for affect in film. Several other propositions were made in order to create a pathway for theorising emotion and affect in film. These included propositions relating to sentimental emotions as well as the notions of *activity* and *passivity* in relation to the role of the audience within the film narrative and based on the identification of active and passive states of the screen characters as determined by the narrative structure.

In the discussion on narrative structure in film, it was suggested in several chapters in this thesis that it relies on agents of causality to drive storytelling. Hollywood narrations, as David Bordwell argues, are not motivated "realistically" (Bordwell, 1985: 24). Hence, active characters are required in Hollywood films to conform to its convention constructions in narrative structure. The Hollywood film aesthetics therefore affords the audience the role of passivity in the viewing experience since the formal elements that accompany such an active state, does not require an "intellectual engagement" (Burnetts, 2017: 59) with such films in order to make meaning. As Plantinga argues:

> […] If emotions are concern based construals, […], and if Hollywood films offer narratives which presume basic, easily comprehended concerns and textually-inscribe pre-focused construals […] then audience members will tend to share similar responses. (Plantinga, 2009: 242)

With independent film, the thesis has argued that the affect text is a vehicle for the elicitation of emotion. Hence the use of formal elements provides affective qualities and meaning to the audience through the film's ability to manipulate/permit a subjective experience of the action space.

A summary of the third section of the thesis has been covered above. Furthermore, each chapter in the thesis has featured a concluding section that ties the arguments made in the chapters together and coherently. It is important though, to reflect on what the first two sections of the thesis and what they have been able to accomplish. Chapter 1 of the thesis provided a comprehensive introduction into American Independent Cinema and the concepts of emotion and affect. The chapter raised a couple of terms which it then defined for the purpose of the thesis. Delineating specific terns then enabled the thesis to set the boundaries of exploration in the rest of the thesis. Chapter 2 then moved to provide a literature review of cognitive film theory, independent cinema, Hollywood cinema and philosophy and explores the dynamic and complex relationship between some of these subjects. Chapter 3 laid out the thesis' methodology with specific focus on research techniques and the validity of textual analysis.

Chapter 4 then provided a comprehensive look at independent cinema, including exploring the industrial and economic history of both the independent and Hollywood sectors and the factors that led to the emergence of the 'independent label'. It then discussed selected films that exemplify such considerations as well as investigated how the aesthetic and emotional qualities of independent films through film form is offered in film. The chapter also explored aesthetics by taking into account quality independent films, as well as storytelling, music and stylistic and thematic elements in film. It is possibly the most important chapter in the thesis as it also discusses the language of emotion of affect and provides a useful table (see Table 4.1) on the key differences in the situation and manifestation of emotion and affect in film. It therefore lays the groundwork for the exploration of such concepts along with in Section Three. The chapter also provides a philosophical framework through principles such as nihilism to show hoe independent films can be understood and valued.

The final chapter in Section Two explored representation and ideology in independent cinema by exploring representation in social, cultural and political contexts as well as the artistic representation in independent cinema. Chapter 5 started off by highlighting theoretical concepts of formalism, realism and illusionism, as it relates to film. The chapter explored realism in film through the works of scholars such as Balázs (1972), Bazin (1957; 1976) and MacCabe (1976). The chapter highlighted the concept of social realism in particular as a means through which film is able to capture the audience's attention to social, political and cultural issue. The purpose of section two was to show how American independent cinema has developed alongside Hollywood cinema with aesthetic, interpretive/ideological and industrial-economic changes in Hollywood influencing and informing independent cinema. The thesis utilised the discourse from Section One and Section Two as basis for the examination of emotion and affect in selected films in Section Three.

Having established research outcomes, the thesis will now propose a foundation for further research, relating to other areas of film that exceed the boundaries of discourse within this thesis.

9.3. Foundation for Further Research

Research carried out so far suggests that the affective experience of human consciousness is metaphorised in the way film is produced and observed. The use of formal devices such as sound, camera movement, position, framing and lighting in films are utilised in a way that connects with visual/moving image and can produce a narrative that each device—if considered individually—is incapable of. The techniques further employed through the use of formal elements in film serves to amplify the audience's experience of film in ways that create discourse that can be both challenging and revealing. Plantinga posits that:

> The attraction of such ways of experiencing are many and diverse, but chiefly among them is the ability of many films to elicit emotion in the spectator, to provide suspense, surprise, fear, [...] in a temporal order that is vivid and ultimately pleasurable. If films approximate conscious experience like no other medium, they do so in their ability to elicit emotional responses to that experience. (Plantinga, 2009: 49)

Hence, such experiences of human consciousness, are objective in their formation (in the way that they have been structured) but also become subjective in the audience's collective experience of such formations. This is because seeing arouses feeling and feeling evokes thinking/responding appropriately to what has been seen. Hence, cognition must also rely on "a holistic experience connected to the emotion, affects and the body" (Plantinga, 2009: 49). It is not enough to identify the elements and structures that allow the audience to partake in the *experiencing process,* but researchers must also explore how such processes translate and are actualised in issues surrounding film discourse in the every-day human consciousness.

Contextual analysis thus provides a basis for the exploration of the cultural, psychological, sociological, and political implications for film interpretations in a broader context. It will be of great value to perform critical analysis on the implications of such film concepts in the modern political climate, specifically in the American climate in which such films have been created. This involves an examination of the cultural context in which films have been produced, along with the ideologies that shroud said culture. Film scholars such as Geoff King, Yannis Tzioumakis, Peter Biskind, and Chris Holmlund have adopted such an approach when considering filmmaking practices in the digital age of film production in the late 20th century. They note how technological advancements within the American film industry marked a shift in the development of film production, and in the film industry as a whole. In the same vein, it is important, perhaps now more than ever, to examine the culture in

which film consumption exists today, specifically with the rise of both short-format content creation on social media (not to be confused with short films) and the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ and Hulu, to name a few.

One way such ideas can be examined is through *interpreting bodies* by looking at the relationship between film critics and the audience. Paul Williams, writing in 1977 *(Film Comment)* contends that "The most depressing aspect of contemporary film criticism is that the intellectual detachment implied by the word 'critic' has given way to attitudes that reflect rather than criticise" film (Paul, 1977: 62). Through an interpretation of the text beyond the boundaries afforded by the cinematic space, it would be worth exploring the sensibilities that are contained within the viewing experience of spectatorship. If film is considered through political ideology for example, it could demonstrate and help film critics and scholars understand how cultures use film for specific agendas and how it serves to influence cultural moments. It would be advantageous for further research to explore contextual analysis rooted in film text analysis as demonstrated through the concepts considered in both sections two and three of this thesis. This could determine how meaning is formed in and through the text outside of the cinematic space. By examining the relationship that exists between interpreting bodies, researchers might discover how the emotional experience of film can be *policed* by viewers when an interpretation of the text through other mediums, affixed by sensibilities, is made possible beyond the boundaries of the cinematic space. In such instances, there are philosophical and psychological elements linked to power struggle and monopoly on knowledge, which is attached to the human condition.

When the 2020 movie *Cuties* (Maïmouna Doucouré) was released on Netflix, audiences were in an uproar about how the child actors were overtly sexualised in the film. The outrage generated a new 'hashtag' on Twitter and "Cancel Netflix" was at the top of the trends on the social media platform. But what sparked such emotionally charged conversations? Are such visceral emotional reactions only limited to the film's content or are there broader cultural contexts and conditions at play? Movies have a huge impact on culture, and culture on movies. In the American context, the film was released amidst a culturally and politically charged environment (the 2020 campaigns for the US presidential election were underway, child sex trafficking rings were being exposed with financer Jeffery Epstein's surrogate, Ghislaine Maxwell at the forefront of such investigations, and frustrations continued to grow in society at large about the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic).

Perhaps the subject matter of the film could have been made more palatable to the audience if it was presented in documentary format to show the devastating effects of the sexualisation of children? Arguably, the storytelling within a movie format—in an attempt to

create a theme in which the negative effects of sexualisation of children is explored—allows for the medium of the message to underscore its message. This is perhaps because the film could be read as leaning towards glorification, rather than condemnation, since the sensationalised visuals forces the audience to associate sexualisation with glorification. *Cuties*, with all such criticisms though, received a critical score of 88% on the review-aggregation website, Rotten Tomatoes. The argument being made here is not to assume any type of moral indignation through a condemnation of the film, but to show the disconnect that exists between the critic and the audience as well as the societal factors that can shape audience's interpretation and reaction to film.

Nevertheless, when discussing such films in purely cognitive terms (within the boundaries of cinema) there is something to be said about the way a film like *Cuties* (2020) is interpreted in contrast to *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006, Valerie Faris and Jonathan Dayton) for example. It certainly draws a comparison to, and raises questions about depiction versus exploitation in film, while also looking at broader implications of such interpretations relating to desensitisation and/or sentimentality. This gives an insight into a different area in film discourse, where there is an assumed disconnect between the critic and the audience in their experience of film. The former's experience of film is perhaps shaped by perhaps by certain sensibilities and the latter relies on temporal/spinal emotion? Perhaps the disconnect transcends politics and is rooted in a difference in sensibilities (where critics engage with a more robust filmography in relation to the average film viewer who only engages with the latest blockbuster film?) Also, how does desensitisation of certain events through every-day experiences affect our emotional response of said events in film? Are audiences today likely to react to a pandemic film in the same way as they reacted to *Contagion* in 2011?

By prioritising political and psychological notions of transience in further research, it could help to further demonstrate how meanings evoked through film are interpreted and understood. There is no doubt that audiences are constantly seeking new ways to connect emotionally with media, a process that has created a viral culture in contemporary media discourse. One of such ways is through political identity and awareness. This inadvertently extends to the way contemporary media is not only sought but understood through a political prism. Questions regarding the encroachment of political ideology in film then serves to examine how the politicisation of film—through political experiences of the every-day—influences the audience's emotional engagement.

As mentioned previously, the culture in which film consumption exists today with the rise of short-format content creation on social media also influences how we understand and interpret texts. Such media forms have created a *viral culture* in which emotional engagement

is achieved through short-form content. Audiences are constantly seeking new ways to connect with media emotionally and political awareness provides an outlet for such emotional provisions. This extends to the way media is sought and interpreted through the political prism. When a video goes viral, there is a general assumption that it has been able to connect with something fundamentally human and affective; that it has tapped into or exposed the fundamentality of transience, through emotions such as anger, joy, and fear. There is a reason some short-form videos go viral, and others do not, or they go viral at a later time because they have become relevant to the current cultural events. Seemingly, such viral videos are able to conjure up a universality that all humans embody and can relate to in one way or another through their viewership. Ideologies within society are emotion generators because an ideology highlight the range of emotions that can be offered by the subject. For example, nihilism may invoke feelings of melancholy and ironic detachment. There should therefore be an exploration into the implication of a socio-political and cultural climate on emotional engagement and film interpretation.

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