Independent Media Topography

Independent media is disrupting the culture industry. Last year, Mel Gibson's "Passion of Christ" and Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" were the most talked-about films; Ani di Franco confirms that really innovative music exists outside the control of the major labels; peer-to-peer and MP3 technologies upended the record industry; Bit Torrent is disrupting video; poetry slams, web blogs, cartoons, graphic novels and the "Left Behind" series are invigorating a moribund publishing world; live theatre, music and performance is at an unprecedented level; and Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now" sets the standard for principled, responsible journalism. America's cultural landscape, business climate and social life are being transformed by the growing universe of independent media.

By "independent," **Digital Indies** includes all those involved in creating culture, be it art, media, information or entertainment, outside the conglomerate culture industry. They include those who self-consciously identify as *independents,* those who share a common political and aesthetic commitment, as well as those small-business creators -- "entrepreneurs" -- who are looking to score big time based on their idiosyncratic talents and, if successful, stop being independents. Indies also include the many media creators from ethnic, racial, national and other backgrounds – and let us not forget "adult" entertainment – that address the tastes of specialized audiences. Finally, it includes those who have long been disparagingly labeled "amateur," "hobbyist" or "prosumer".

In order to determine the relative scope and scale of US independent media, **DI** is putting together what we call the "Independent Media Topography." We are using a very inclusive definition of independent media, both in terms of what can be identified as independent and the media that is employed. Following the inspired model of Wikipedia, we invite our readers to contribute information to this chart – with any suggestion (be it a correction or addition), please provide the source of the data.

DI seeks to advance the vibrant independent culture that exists throughout America. Part to this effort is to define the popular movement in detailed economic and financial terms. To this end, we need to not only specify the role of media makers, but incorporate the active contribution – both critically and financially – of the audiences who support such makers. This dialectic, of maker and audience, is not only factor in creating a distinct and original aesthetic (often appropriated by corporate culture), but one expression of the growing popular resistance to the culture industry.

Jivan Tabibian, a founder of the Sundance Institute and currently Armenia's ambassador to the OSCE (the European Community's "security council"), once observed that research about independent media has much in common with cartography: "Like any roadmap, the utility is not in duplicating reality, but in providing enough road signs and benchmarks to help one at least not get lost, even if one does not always reach one's destination." In this spirit, **DI** seeks to layout a topographical roadmap of today's independent media landscape.

Submit contributions to the Independent Media Topography to indietopography@digitalindies.com

Independent Media Topography

Media	Sector	Examples	Measurement Criteria	(Latest year)	(Base year)
Film - Production	Production companies		# 7 majors # 16 mini-majors # 50-80 major indie prod companies # 1,750 smaller indie prod companies [#18]		
Film - Theatrical	Theaters	Landmark	Movie ticket sales [#1]	$9.2 bil (03)	$7.7 bil (00)
			Indie ticket sales		
			Indie releases [non-MPAA] [#1]	265 (03)	229 (99)
			Theatres showing indies		
	Film Festivals		Indie film festivals [#2]	950 (04)	
		Sundance	Sundance entries [#9]	2,613 (04)	2,023 (03)
	Other venues:	rooftops, microcinemas			
Film - Shorts			Live screenings		
			Web sites		
Home Video	Tape/DVD	Netflix, Amazon.com	Home video sales/rentals [#11]	$26.6 bil (04)	$19.5 bil (95)
			Indie home video sales/rentals		
			Indie retailers =		
			Indie titles released =		
	Video streaming / download services				
Television	PTV channels [#3]			379 (04)	
	PEG and public access				
	Indie satellite services	LINK TV, Free Speech TV			
	Basic cable showing indies	Bravo, Sundance, IFC			
	Pay services showing indies	HBO, Showtime			

Music / Other Audio	Radio		Indie radio stations [#4]	750	
	Satellite services				
	Audio streaming/download services	Podcasting	Podcasting audience [#14]	6MM (05)	
	CD/etc.	Amazon.com	Total sales [#15]	$11.8 bil (03)	$14.3 bil (00)
			Indie sales	$2.9 bil (03)	$4.0 bil (00)
			Indie titles released =		
			Indie distribution =		
			Indie record stores [#13]	13,300 (00)	13,832 (90)
Publishing	Books		Total trade book market		
			Indie publishers [#5]	7,000 (04)	
			Indie titles released =		
			Indie book stores share [#12]	15% (00)	33% (91)
	Magazines		Indie literary magazines [#6]	1,000 (04)	
			Other indie magazines		
	Newspapers		Weekly newspapers [#7]	6,704 (50.2 mil circulation)	
	Online Journalism	FreePress, OneWorld, AlterNet, OpenDemoracy			
Videogames	Console and PC Software		Software sales [#16]	$7.3 bil (04)	$3.2 bil (95)
			Indie PC sales [#17]	$500 mil (04)	
			Indie developers [#8]	1,500	

Live venues	Non-profit prof theatres [#10]			262 (00)	
	Indie music clubs				
	Indie comedy clubs				
	Indie poetry/spoken word clubs				
Funders of indie media	Public – (film / TV)	CPB (ITVS, NBPC, etc.) NEH, NEA, state agencies			
	Non-profit	Grantmakers for the Arts			
	For-profit -- VC / Private Equity				
Indie "trade" groups	Film	IFP, IFP/West, IDA			
	TV	AIVF, FAF			
	Music	FMC, NARIP			
	Publishing	Writers Union			
	Videogames	IGDA			

Sources:

1. MPAA, 2004
2. New York Times, Dec. 16, 2004, p. E3.
3. PBS
4. NPR
5. Estimate, Robert Baensch (NYU).
6. New York Times, Dec. 27, 2004. p. E1.
7. Editor & Publisher, 2004.
8. Tom Loftus, MSNBC online, July 31, 2003.
9. Adam Leipzig, "The Odds Get Even Longer," New York Times, January 17, 2005.
10. US Bureau of Census, Statistical Abstract, 2002, chart 1214.
11. Veronis Shuler Stevenson, Communication Industry Forecast, 2003, p. 44-47.
12. NPD Group, in Retail Business Research Handbook, p. 586.
13. Audits & Surveys, National Retail Census, p.xx.
14. Pew Report, April 2005
15. RIAA, "2003 Consumer Profile," 2004, for totals; for indies see BWonline estimates at 28 percent in 2000 and 25 percent in 2003 (see BWonline, Nov. 6, 2003).
16. Entertainment Software Association, 2003, from NPD Group data, 2004.
17. Parallel Distribution, estimate based on ESA data.
18. James Jaeger, "Movie Industry," www.necfilms.com/moviepub.