



Indie: An American Film Culture (Film and Culture Series)

Michael Z. Newman

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From *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) to *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), America's independent films often seem to defy classification. Their strategies of storytelling and representation vary widely, and they range from raw, no-budget productions to the more polished releases of Hollywood's "specialty" divisions. Understanding American indies involves more than just considering films. Filmmakers, distributors, exhibitors, festivals, critics, and audiences play a role in the art's identity, which is always understood in relation to the Hollywood mainstream.

By locating the American indie in the historical context of the Sundance-Miramax era (the mid-1980s to the end of the 2000s), Michael Z. Newman considers indie cinema as an alternative American film culture. His work isolates patterns of character and realism, formal play, and oppositionality in these films and the function of festivals, art houses, and critical media in promoting them. He accounts for the power of audiences to distinguish indie films from mainstream Hollywood and to seek socially emblematic characters and playful form in their narratives. Analyzing films such as *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1996), *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and *Juno* (2007), along with the work of Nicole Holofcener, Jim Jarmusch, John Sayles, Steven Soderbergh, and the Coen brothers, Newman investigates the conventions that cast indies as culturally legitimate works of art and sustain these films' appeal. In doing so, he not only binds these diverse works together within a cluster of distinct viewing strategies but also invites readers to reevaluate the difference of independent cinema, as well as its relationship to class and taste culture.

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