

Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire
Faculty of Creative Technologies

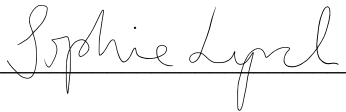
**The ‘Other’ in Cinema:
Independent Film at Sundance Film Festival**

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Submitted to the Faculty of Creative Technologies in candidacy for the
Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Film and Television Production 2023/24

Statement of Academic Integrity / Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Hons) in Film and Television Production. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed: 

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Ruth Moran for her invaluable input during the writing of this thesis. I would also like to extend my thanks to all of the staff at the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire for helping with my research.

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Introduction

In the vast landscape of the cinematic world, where Hollywood often reigns supreme, there exists a parallel universe of storytelling known as independent cinema. This realm, inhabited by filmmakers considered to be outsiders, thrives on narratives divergent from the mainstream, offering a kaleidoscope of voices and perspectives often marginalised by traditional studio systems. This thesis will examine independent filmmakers through the consideration of the philosophical idea of the Other.

The concept of the Other is a complex idea explored by philosophers across various traditions of philosophy and anthropology. This thesis will analyse this concept through perspectives including existentialism¹, phenomenology², and postmodernism³, focusing on the recognition of entities or individuals as different or external to oneself. The relationship between the self and the Other is central to understanding identity, social dynamics, and human existence.

Initially rooted in prejudiced constructs, the Other was historically perceived as inferior to the self, often defined by Western cultural biases and power dynamics. Jacques Derrida's work delves into the concept of the Other through postmodernism. His thinking explores the complex relationships between language, identity, and power. Derrida's notion of the Other challenges traditional philosophical binaries, suggesting that identities are constructed in relation to what they are not, or the Other. He deconstructs the idea of fixed identity categories, arguing that language and discourse shape how we understand ourselves and others. Derrida's philosophy encourages questioning and

¹ Existentialism is a philosophical theory which emphasises the importance of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own acts through free will.

² Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.

³ A set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning.

destabilising hierarchical structures, advocating for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity and difference.⁴

Emmanuel Levinas, a French philosopher with roots in phenomenology, developed the concept of the Other as a core aspect of his philosophy of ethics. According to Levinas, the Other represents the profound difference and uniqueness of another person or entity. In his view, encountering the Other is a crucial ethical imperative, demanding a response of responsibility and openness. This encounter brings about a sense of ethical obligation, requiring a response that acknowledges the distinctiveness of the Other and avoids attempts to control or dominate. Encountering the Other also exposes one's vulnerability, prompting a recognition of the limits of one's own understanding. Levinas argues for an ethics centred on acknowledging and respecting the uniqueness of others, emphasising responsibility, compassion, and a willingness to respond to the needs of the Other.⁵

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher who faced discrimination and legal persecution for his homosexuality, therefore considered an Other himself.⁶ His post-structuralist philosophy regarding the Other centred on the idea of power dynamics and societal norms. He emphasised how institutions and systems of power create and perpetuate categories of difference, labelling certain groups as Other or deviant. Foucault argued that these categorisations serve to maintain power structures by marginalising those who do not conform to dominant norms. Thus, his philosophy of the Other highlights the ways in which power shapes perceptions of identity and determines who is included or excluded from societal norms and structures.⁷

⁴ Calcagno, Antonio. *Badiou and Derrida : Politics, Events and Their Time*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007, pp. 33-34.

⁵ Sarukkai, Sundar. "The 'Other' in Anthropology and Philosophy." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 32, no. 24, p. 1407.

⁶ Halperin, David M. "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality." *Representations*, no. 63, 1998, p. 93.

⁷ Rajchman, John. *Truth and Eros : Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2010, p. 111.

Simone de Beauvoir, prominent feminist theorist, was greatly influenced by existentialist philosophies in her work on the Other. Her work examines how women have been historically marginalised and treated as the Other in relation to men. De Beauvoir argues that women have been defined primarily in terms of their relationship to men, rather than as autonomous individuals. She highlights the ways in which societal norms and expectations have limited women's agency and perpetuated their subordinate status. De Beauvoir's analysis sheds light on the systemic inequalities faced by women and calls for a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles and structures. Her work continues to be influential in feminist thought, challenging readers to recognise and address the Othering of women in society.⁸

By reflecting on the works of these philosophers, this thesis will explore the notion of the Other in cinema, and examine how independent cinema, sometimes referred to as 'indie', challenges traditional norms and representations. In particular it will focus on Hollywood's tendency to marginalise different cinema cultures, and the role of the Sundance Film Festival in promoting independent cinema. This thesis observes independent cinema to be an Other, a group of artists with certain distinctions to mainstream Hollywood in terms of identity, representation and power dynamics; a section of filmmakers with underrepresented voices who tend to have less opportunity because of their own identities as Others. Sundance can be viewed as a vehicle to promote these often unseen artists, honouring a group of Others unappreciated by the larger film industry.

This thesis aims to prove the value of sharing the stories of Others. Film has the capacity to bridge divides in humanity by representing a wide range of voices, backgrounds, and identities. Being exposed to these stories enriches the audience's understanding of the human experience, fostering empathy, and promoting inclusivity. Diverse stories challenge stereotypes, break down barriers, and

⁸ Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Classic, 1997, pp. 13-17.

provide validation for those whose experiences have been historically ignored or misrepresented. Moreover, exposure to diverse narratives encourages critical thinking, broadens cultural awareness, and promotes social change by highlighting issues of inequality, discrimination, and injustice. Hearing diverse stories from Others in cinema is essential for creating a more inclusive, equitable, and empathetic society.

This thesis delves into the intricate relationship between independent cinema and the Hollywood juggernaut, exploring how Sundance Film Festival emerged as a pivotal player in reshaping the landscape of contemporary filmmaking. By examining the evolution of independent films within the broader context of the Hollywood industry, the profound impact of Sundance in bolstering the visibility and commercial viability of these marginalised voices is uncovered. Drawing insights from philosophical discourse on the concept of the Other, it unravels the significance of Sundance as a catalyst for inclusivity and recognition of diverse narratives.

The chapters of this thesis navigate the spectrum of experiences encountered by independent filmmakers within the realm of Sundance. Chapter One will begin the exploration of the Other in the context of independent cinema, underscoring the importance of inclusivity and diversity in the mainstream film industry. This chapter delves into the historical evolution of independent filmmaking to contextualise the necessity of platforms like Sundance. The founding principles of Sundance are examined, highlighting its commitment to nurturing talent outside of the Hollywood system and prioritising narrative authority over profit motives. Sundance's transformative impact on reshaping the landscape of independent cinema and providing a platform for marginalised voices to challenge mainstream narratives, thereby fostering a sense of comradery, is explored. By recognising the significance of independent cinema as an Other to Hollywood and Sundance Film Festival as a pivotal platform for the marginalised, this chapter underscores the need for alternative spaces in the film industry for the Other.

Chapter Two focuses on Sundance's exponential growth during the 1990s. From the initial euphoria of newfound exposure and opportunity to the challenges posed by the encroachment of commercial interests, the complex interplay between artistic integrity and economic pressures are unravelled. This period marked a transformative journey for the festival, as it transitioned from a niche gathering of independent filmmakers to a global event, enhancing a perpetual cycle of otherness. While the festival enjoyed numerous successes, catapulting indie filmmakers to prominence and fostering a sense of community among outsiders, it also faced significant challenges as Hollywood's influence seeped into its proceedings. This evolution underscores the complexities inherent in maintaining alternative spaces within an increasingly commercialised industry. Through examining the origins and consequences of this shift, as well as reactions within the new group of Others, this chapter aims to illuminate the evolving landscape of independent cinema and the ongoing struggle to balance artistic innovation with industry realities.

The complex dynamics of gender bias within the realm of independent cinema is investigated in Chapter Three, particularly focusing on the experiences of women filmmakers. Within the ostensibly more inclusive space of independent cinema in comparison to Hollywood, women filmmakers still face formidable barriers that hinder their creative expression and limit their access to resources and opportunities. Despite Sundance's purported ethos of inclusivity, women are still not awarded the same sustained support as men. Drawing on insights from De Beauvoir's theories of women as Others, this chapter critically examines the pervasive gender bias that undermines women's advancement in the film industry. Through an exploration of female filmmakers at Sundance, this chapter seeks to understand the extent of the challenges they face and evaluate the efficacy of initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality. Through a nuanced analysis of structural barriers, institutional biases, and intersectional challenges, this chapter sheds light on the ongoing struggle for gender equality and diverse representation in independent cinema, ultimately advocating for the creation of more inclusive spaces where all voices, regardless of gender or background, can thrive.

This thesis aims to illuminate not only the triumphs but also the tribulations inherent in the journey of independent filmmakers. Sundance Film Festival, a bastion of independent cinema, offers a platform for these marginalised voices, yet biases persist. Efforts are made to dismantle barriers and empower silenced voices, but still disparities endure. Through the lens of Sundance, insights into the resilience of Others in the film industry, their unwavering commitment to their craft, and their quest for an audience amidst the ever-shifting currents of the film industry are gained. Navigating through the nuances of inclusion and exclusion, a reminder of the profound power of storytelling to bridge divides, foster empathy, and celebrate the rich tapestry of human experience emerges. This thesis aims to promote a cinematic landscape to strive towards, where all voices are heard, all stories are valued, and all Others are welcomed.

Chapter One: The Origins of Sundance in the Independent Film Landscape

In this chapter, the significance of including outsiders in the mainstream film industry will be delved into, particularly focusing on the Sundance Film Festival and its relationship to independent cinema. The historical context of independent filmmaking, from the Hollywood Renaissance to the emergence of the New American Cinema, will be examined in order to fully realise the necessity of a film festival like Sundance. Authors such as Jonas Mekas, advocate of avant-garde cinema and co-founder of the film journal *Film Culture*⁹, and Yannis Tzioumakis, a prominent scholar of American independent cinema and the global film industry¹⁰, will be drawn upon in this chapter. This will contribute to the analysis of Sundance's founding principles under Robert Redford's leadership, emphasising its commitment to diversity and cultivating talent outside the Hollywood system. Sundance's impact on reshaping the landscape of independent cinema, providing a platform for emerging voices and challenging mainstream narratives, will be explored. By establishing the significance of independent cinema through the consideration of it as an Other to Hollywood, Sundance Film Festival will be highlighted as a pivotal platform that provides a voice to the marginalised, thereby addressing the need for alternative spaces in the film industry for the Other.

Independent cinema is more than a genre; it is a spirit that rebels against the conventional. At its core, it represents the essence of artistic freedom and expression in the world of film. Being an Other in cinema implies breaking away from the constraints of mainstream storytelling and embracing the freedom to explore unique narratives and characters. Independent cinema is a realm where creators can pursue their visions beyond the conventions of the studio system. It is about storytelling that dares to defy the norm. In this context, an independent filmmaker who challenges the mainstream, crafting stories that push boundaries and engage with unconventional themes, can be analysed through the philosophical notion of the Other in relation to Hollywood.

Sundance Film Festival, first founded in 1978 as the U.S. Film Festival, promised to be a festival which let these outsiders in. It was intended to celebrate all sorts of voices and to allow a diverse representation of humanity to be seen by audiences. To understand the need for a platform like Sundance, the state of independent cinema before its inception must be examined.

In the 1960s and 70s, often referred to as the 'New Hollywood' or the 'Hollywood Renaissance,' the definition of independent cinema underwent a significant transformation, reshaping the landscape for filmmakers seeking to get their films seen. The films of the Hollywood Renaissance represented a

⁹ "Biography." *Jonas Mekas*, <https://jonasmekas.com/bio.php>. Accessed 3 November 2023.

¹⁰ "Academic Staff – Department of Communication and Media." *University of Liverpool*, <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/communication-and-media/staff/yannis-tzioumakis/>. Accessed 3 November 2023.

fusion of independent film production with major studios, who were looking to regain some control over the film industry after the collapse of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s¹¹. They were marked by one new critical distinction: an unprecedented level of creative control granted to filmmakers. The era saw the rise of films like *Easy Rider* (1969) and *The Secret of Santa Vittoria* (1969), which, although distributed by major companies, could be regarded as independent due to their production by companies outside the studio system. Yet, these films differed markedly from one another in terms of content, style, and approach.

Another aspect of independent cinema, known as the ‘New American cinema’, emerged during this time. For these filmmakers, independence meant entirely breaking free from the traditional structure and influence of the U.S. film industry. The New American Cinema movement sought to liberate itself from over-professionalism and over-technicality, emphasising intuition and improvisation over strict discipline¹². During this era, these independent films shared common characteristics, including their appeal to a younger audience and their willingness to challenge established storytelling traditions. These movies explored contentious subjects like violence (*Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)), sex (*Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *The Graduate* (1967)), and drugs (*Easy Rider* (1969)). These films not only were produced by studios outside of the major Hollywood studios, but they intentionally challenged the norms and conventions of mainstream American cinema of the time. This assertion of independence and defiance against the mainstream aligns with Levinas’ concept of the Other, as they represent a marginalised perspective that disrupts the hegemony of traditional Hollywood cinema. They introduced various cinematic techniques, often associated with art-house filmmaking in Europe and Japan, to American cinema. Techniques like improvisational acting, jump-cuts¹³, freeze frames¹⁴, and more experimental visual styles challenged the previously unobtrusive style of Hollywood films¹⁵. Their divergence from the normative style of Hollywood films positioned independent filmmakers as an alternative entity to the dominant Hollywood establishment, allowing a wider range of topics and voices to be observed.

However, despite these artistic advancements, film distribution remained a significant challenge for independent filmmakers. The exhibition remained largely controlled by the major studios and a few

¹¹ Hefner, Brooks E. “Milland Alone: The End of the System, Post-Studio Stardom, and the Total Auteur.” *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2014, pp. 3–18.

¹² Mekas, Jonas. “A Call for a New Generation of Filmmakers.” *Film Culture Reader*, edited by P. Adams Sitney, First Cooper Square Press, 2000. p. 74.

¹³ A jump cut is an editing technique whereby a piece of footage is removed from a single continuous shot, making time seem to jump forward.

¹⁴ A freeze frame occurs when the action on the screen pauses, creating a still image, usually for dramatic effect or to highlight a particular moment.

¹⁵ Tzioumakis, Yannis. *American Independent Cinema : Second Edition*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017, p.167.

minor releasing companies. To achieve national distribution, filmmakers were often forced to accept the dominance of established major distributors. Some independent filmmakers, despite seeking independence from the studio system, still relied on major distributors for marketing and distribution. This paradoxical dependence on the majors was both a testament to the success of these filmmakers' individualistic voices and an acknowledgment that their revolution had not completely overthrown the studio system.

The early 1970s had witnessed the blockbuster successes of films like *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977), rejuvenating studio confidence in mass-market commercial storytelling. This era of mega-productions seemed to signal a bleak future for small-scale, independent filmmaking. However, in the midst of the Hollywood Renaissance, a ray of hope emerged for independent filmmakers in the form of the Sundance Film Festival.

The Sundance Film Festival, originally known as the U.S. Film Festival, was established in 1978 in Salt Lake City. Its primary goal was to provide a platform for films made outside of the Hollywood system. However, the festival's true transformation occurred when it came under the leadership of Robert Redford's Sundance Institute in 1984. Redford's vision was clear – to amplify voices coming from outside the mainstream. He “simply wanted to get the movies seen”¹⁶ by providing a space for outsiders in the world of cinema. It was a response to the overwhelming mainstream dominance of Hollywood and a beacon of hope for independent filmmakers seeking an audience for their unique stories. He created an exciting opportunity for like-minded filmmakers to gather and appreciate each others' art, without the domineering influence of Hollywood. As a Hollywood star himself, he exemplified Levinas' ideas to recognise and respect the Other by promoting independent cinema.

One of Sundance's core principles was its commitment to diversity in filmmaking. The festival aimed to be an epitome of diverse voices in the film industry, presenting works by women, African Americans, and other ethnic minorities whose voices had been overlooked in mainstream cinema. Sundance sought to break the mould of mainstream cinema's homogeneity by offering a platform to underrepresented voices, acknowledging that true independent cinema should reflect the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives. Multiculturalism was Sundance's *raison d'être*¹⁷: the festival presented films that addressed the concerns and narratives of marginalised communities, addressing issues often ignored by mainstream cinema. By providing a platform for underrepresented voices and addressing issues often ignored by mainstream cinema, Sundance embodies Levinas' idea of ethical

¹⁶ Levy, Emanuel. *Cinema of Outsiders : The Rise of American Independent Film*. New York University Press, 1999, p. 39.

¹⁷ The primary purpose or essential reason for someone or something's existence.

responsibility towards the Other, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic film industry by including and promoting the work of a more whole society.

The Sundance Institute's Screenwriting and Filmmaking Labs, which began in 1981, marked the festival's commitment to nurturing talent outside the studio system. The festival became a premier exhibition platform for independent films. The Sundance labs provided emerging filmmakers with the opportunity to develop their craft, emphasising storytelling over profit motives, marking itself as an Other to Hollywood's capitalistic priorities. As filmmakers gathered to tell their stories, a strong sense of community began to emerge. Filmmakers were given the freedom to explore their narratives and develop their craft beyond the confines of the traditional studio pitch sessions, emphasising the importance of the storytelling process itself. They worked on the process of articulating a story, pushing creative boundaries and narrative experimentation. The focus was on the work itself, not economic gains or celebrity glory, embodying Foucault's perception of Others working to subvert categorisations by ignoring Hollywood's expectations of filmmakers to capitalise on their art. The labs made it possible to believe in the capacity for filmmaking against all odds, providing a stark contrast to the perception of Hollywood as a closed circuit where profit motives often overshadowed artistic innovation. Being associated with the Sundance labs provided filmmakers with an opportunity to have their work seen and considered, even when agents and mainstream industry executives would not engage.¹⁸ The independent spirit encouraged at Sundance became a sentiment within the creative community that no economic downturn could fully abolish, a commitment worth fighting for.

Sundance Film Festival came to represent an opportunity for emerging filmmakers and low-budget films to secure distribution deals, serving as the culmination of a challenging journey marked by fundraising, years of production, and the quest for an audience¹⁹. By focusing on the creative process and emphasising narrative clarity, it offered a counterpoint to the commercial-driven Hollywood industry. The festival's commitment to diversity and its support for emerging voices helped reshape the landscape of independent cinema. It became a realm where creators could challenge the mainstream narrative, pushing boundaries and exploring unconventional themes. It was a space where the spirit of the Other could thrive, forging a path for films that dared to be different.

By examining the historical context of independent filmmaking in this chapter, Sundance's commitment to diversity and talent cultivation outside of Hollywood can be acknowledged and appreciated. Independent cinema embodies rebellion against mainstream norms, providing a space for storytellers to break free and explore unique narratives. Sundance, as a beacon of diversity, succeeded

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 41.

in amplifying underrepresented voices, reflecting the philosophical notion of the Other as elucidated by Foucault's examination of power dynamics and Levinas' emphasis on honouring the Other. By working to exhibit the works of those who could not previously find an audience, Sundance can be considered vital in representing marginalised voices and promoting diverse storytelling. By the 1990s Sundance had firmly established itself as a vital platform for independent filmmaking, setting the stage for the emergence of a new film landscape. It successfully highlighted the significance of integrating outsiders into the mainstream film industry and demonstrated that when classed as a lesser Other, one will always find or create a space in which they do belong.

Chapter Two: Sundance's Evolution Under Commercialism

The following chapter delves into a pivotal era of Sundance, focusing on the exponential growth of the festival during the 1990s. A transformative journey for Sundance was witnessed in this period, as it evolved from a niche gathering of independent filmmakers into a global industry phenomenon. Understanding this evolution is essential to understanding the consequential new need for a space for the Other. It sheds light on the complex interplay between artistic expression and commercial interests within the film industry. By considering the works of authors such as Emmanuel Levy, film journalist and professor of sociology²⁰, and John Berra, film critic and PHD qualified lecturer in American independent film²¹, this chapter will explore the perpetual cycle of otherness enhanced by Sundance's shift towards commerciality.

While Sundance enjoyed numerous successes, catapulting independent filmmakers to prominence and fostering a sense of community among outsiders, it also faced significant challenges. As Sundance experienced exponential growth and Hollywood's influence seeped into its proceedings, the festival underwent a transformation. What began as a beacon of independence gradually became exclusionary, favouring commercially viable projects over diverse voices. This evolution underscores the complexities inherent in maintaining alternative spaces within an increasingly commercialised industry. As Hollywood dominance grew, a new group of Others emerged – filmmakers who found themselves marginalised within the confines of Sundance's shifting landscape. This chapter will examine the origins and consequences of this shift and explore the reactions within this new group of Others, investigating how they found refuge in new spaces born out of the prevailing desire for inclusivity.

After a successful decade in operation, Sundance was transforming into a cinematic phenomenon, one highly anticipated annually by independent filmmakers as well as audiences. In 1989, *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) took home the Audience Award at Sundance before going on to win the prestigious Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival. Directed by Steven Soderbergh, the film not only achieved critical acclaim but also enjoyed commercial success, grossing \$24 million.²² This was further proof that there was vibrant life outside of Hollywood and triggered the biggest bidding war for its distribution rights Sundance had ever seen. Similarly, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), a modestly

²⁰ "Levy Bio." *Emmanuel Levy: 24/7*, <https://emanuellevy.com/emanue/>. Accessed 25 November 2023.

²¹ "Authors." *University of Chicago Press*, <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/author/B/J/au5891154.html>. Accessed 25 November 2023.

²² Turan, Kenneth. *Sundance to Sarajevo : Film Festivals and the World They Made*. University of California Press, 2002 p.25.

budgeted film at \$100,000, became a cultural phenomenon after its Sundance debut. Following a midnight screening, the film was acquired for just over \$1 million and went on to gross a staggering \$140 million²³. The success of this film not only demonstrated the festival's ability to identify and promote unconventional storytelling but also showcased the commercial viability of independent projects. This achievement highlighted the impact a Sundance debut could have on a project's trajectory, solidifying the festival's reputation as a stepping stone to critical and commercial success.

Sundance not only showcased films but also became a place where audiences could witness emerging talent early in their careers, from Stephen Soderbergh's unprecedented success after *sex, lies and videotape* and Ashley Judd's career-launching debut in *Ruby In Paradise* (1993), to Quentin Tarantino's bold statements during a Q&A session after the premiere of *Reservoir Dogs* (1992): "I don't have to justify (the violence), I love it."²⁴ Critics and audiences alike would make their annual pilgrimage to Park City to discover the emerging talent poised for stardom and anticipate the next cultural phenomenon. These success stories showcased how Sundance could serve as a launchpad for independent filmmakers, propelling them into the mainstream.

The demonstration of an audience base and consequent profit potential for artists and narratives historically marginalised by Hollywood underscored the viability of independent cinema. Perceived as an Other by the mainstream industry, independent filmmakers were initially relegated to a secondary status in Hollywood's profit-driven agenda. However, as independent productions showcased their commercial appeal by resonating with specialised audience demographics, perceptions towards these filmmakers changed. The appreciation of alternative artistic expressions prompted a re-evaluation from Hollywood wherein differences were acknowledged as assets rather than liabilities. Sundar Sarukkai, scientist and philosopher²⁵, theorises that "there is an ethical responsibility not to violate the other by reducing it to one's own system of thought".²⁶ While still operating for capitalistic motives, Hollywood began to acknowledge the importance of a range of artistic endeavours different to their own by recognising the necessity of diverse voices.

These trends of the 1990s initiated a renewed interest in independent cinema. The subsequent entry of Hollywood into this arena intensified the competitive landscape. Harvey Weinstein co-founded the entertainment company Miramax who helped to popularise Sundance with large bids to secure

²³ Ibid, p. 25.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 29.

²⁵ "Museum of the Future." *Goethe Institut*, https://www.goethe.de/ins/in/en/kul/art/fut/fu1/skk.html#:~:text=Photo%3A%20Prof._Sundar%20Sarukkai,%2C%20India%20from%202010%2D2015. Accessed 27 November 2023.

²⁶ Sarukkai, op.cit., p. 1407.

distribution rights, for example with *sex, lies, and videotape*.²⁷ As he put it, “It’s not like they can just go make a home movie. The stakes are a little higher now that there’s a forum for it. This really is a world stage.”²⁸ There was now an established audience for independent cinema: while 15750 seats were sold for the 1985 festival, this number increased by nearly 900% to 135922 in 1999 with huge potential for box office profits.²⁹ The world had begun to pay attention to the Others.

The transformation of Sundance into a major international event, akin to Cannes Film Festival or Toronto International Film Festival, has brought both benefits and challenges. While it has provided exposure to independent filmmakers and added professionalism to the industry, it also introduced a more competitive and commercially oriented atmosphere. The festival, once a communal and alternative gathering, has turned into a high-stakes marketplace, with press attention, career boosts, and likely distribution hinging on its popular hits and prize winners. This transformation highlights Foucault’s theory that power structures can influence the representation and recognition of marginalised voices within cultural institutions. The growth has led to an influx of industry executives, soaring prices for access, and a shift towards films with greater commercial potential. The increasing numbers of major producers willing to pay exorbitant fees, underscore the festival's growing allure as a marketplace rather than a haven for artistic expression. The coveted Fast Passes, priced at up to \$5,000, became symbols of access to the entire festival and a quest for the next big thing. As veteran independent director Victor Nunez notes, Sundance turned into a “two-edged sword,”³⁰ offering both recognition and temptation to commercialise one’s art.

The success of certain Sundance films in breaking through commercially has intensified the festival's attraction for distribution companies. This trend has created a dynamic where the festival's original goal of promoting diverse and unconventional voices is overshadowed by the pursuit of commercially viable projects. While once solely trying to benefit the Other that the Sundance founders had recognised within the film industry, the festival’s priorities began to shift when a balance between artistry and commerce was suggested. Soderbergh himself, undoubtedly one of the biggest beneficiaries of the festival’s early days, reflecting on the festival's evolution, grumbled about the "encroachment of commerce"³¹ that now overshadows artistic endeavours. The commercialisation has shifted the focus from a celebration of independent voices to a platform where Hollywood seeks cheap writers and directors. Sundance, once a laid-back non-Hollywood festival, evolved into a

²⁷ Tzioumakis, op.cit., p.237.

²⁸ Levy, op.cit., p. 41.

²⁹ Turan, op.cit., p. 26.

³⁰ Ibid, p.31.

³¹ Levy, op.cit., p. 40.

tension-filled bidding war where careers were put on the line.³² Derrida, in deconstructionist³³ theory, emphasises the importance of questioning binary oppositions and hierarchies in language and culture³⁴. In this context, Sundance's transition from a communal gathering to a competitive marketplace reflects a shift in the festival's binary oppositions, such as artistic expression versus commercial success, communal inclusivity versus industry exclusivity. This emphasis on deconstruction encourages the questioning of the stability and legitimacy of these oppositions, recognising them as socially constructed rather than inherent truths, thereby undermining the power Hollywood has as an institution in demeaning the Other.

While Sundance's immediate beneficiaries remain the independent filmmakers, the festival's commercialisation has also forced smaller, genuinely independent distributors out of the market. Hollywood's interest in the festival as a source of acquisitions has marginalised distributors operating on the fringes and created a competitive environment where filmmakers must cater to Hollywood mainstream expectations to secure distribution, instead of focusing on finding a distributor that genuinely matches their passion and can creatively commit to the project. Previously, all distributors were hailed with importance as they were considered the primary avenue for ensuring a film's success beyond the festival circuit. However, smaller distributors have since not been afforded equal opportunities compared to their larger counterparts, thereby perpetuating the emergence of another group of Others, forced to contend with the dominance of the Hollywood machine.

The festival's growth has also led to the emergence of Others within the audience, further complicating the delicate balance between commercial interests and the celebration of independent cinema. Even the 'general audience' is made up of those on the fringes of the film industry, with the more exclusive invitations reserved for well-known directors, producers, and critics. Accommodations, film screenings, and workshops are sold out months in advance of the festival.³⁵ With its initial goal being to find an audience for voices that previously went unheard, it contradicts its fundamental principles by failing to amplify these newly empowered voices to all those who would like to listen.

The festival, once dedicated to films outside the Hollywood system, instead began to cater to the dual needs of directors gravitating towards Hollywood careers and the studio system seeking fresh talent and films outside its usual production cycle. For example, *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) by directing

³² Levy, op.cit., p. 42.

³³ Deconstructionism is a philosophical approach that questions the stability of meaning in language and texts by revealing hidden assumptions and contradictions, thereby challenging traditional notions of truth and authority.

³⁴ Calcagno, op.cit., pp. 33-34.

³⁵ Berra, John. *Declarations of Independence : American Cinema and the Partiality of Independent Production*. Intellect Books, 2008, p. 158.

duo Joel and Ethan Coen had a budget of \$40 million from Warner Brothers, yet was accepted into the festival because of the Coen brothers' impact on the independent sector with their debut *Blood Simple* (1984).³⁶ This can be further understood by considering Derrida's theories regarding the subjectiveness of fixed identities, by highlighting the blurring of boundaries between traditional categories. The festival's shift towards accommodating filmmakers straddling both Hollywood and independent spheres challenges conventional distinctions, eroding the delineation between mainstream and alternative cinema. This convergence ultimately marginalises those who remain firmly outside the established studio systems, exacerbating their status as the Other within the evolving landscape of Sundance.

The increased popularity of Sundance has created a scenario where not all independent films can find a place in the limelight, leading to a rigorous selection process and a focus on films that align with market expectations. Year after year there has been exponential growth in the number of entrants: submissions increased from 60 in 1987 to 2,000 in 2003 to 12,187 in 2014.³⁷ With the likelihood of being accepted into this festival, once intended for all Others, extremely low, rejected filmmakers have taken things into their own hands. Sundance's ascent to exclusivity has given rise to a multitude of parallel festivals that aim to capture the spirit of the independent film scene. These events, born out of rejection or a desire for a different ethos, have carved their own niche, adding more diversity to the cinematic landscape of Park City during the annual Sundance frenzy.

Foremost among these alternatives is Slamdance, a festival founded by four directors whose films were initially turned down by Sundance. In its early years, Slamdance provocatively billed itself as the "First Annual Guerrilla International Film Festival" in direct response to the rejection faced at Sundance. Despite facing criticism from Sundance Institute president Robert Redford, who deemed it parasitical, Slamdance has evolved into a venerable institution, attracting over 2,000 film submissions and expanding its reach to major cities worldwide.³⁸

Other notable competitors include No Dance, recognized as the world's first and only DVD-projected film festival, and Slam dunk, which gained attention by screening a documentary at the local Elks Hall after Sundance cancelled it due to legal threats³⁹. Additionally, entities like Lapdance, DigiDance, Dances with Films, and Son of Sam Dance have emerged, each contributing its unique flavour to the independent film scene. These parallel festivals have become a platform for showcasing first-time filmmakers and undiscovered talent. They align with Derrida's emphasis on perpetual questioning and

³⁶ Ibid, p. 155.

³⁷ Tzioumakis, op.cit., p. 231.

³⁸ Turan, Kenneth. op.cit., p. 26.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 26.

destabilisation of hierarchies, as well as Levinas' belief in the ethical responsibility to recognise and embrace the Other.

Slamdance, in particular, emphasises its commitment to this demographic, aligning itself with the indie spirit that some feel is waning at Sundance. In contrast to Sundance, it maintains a focus on 'truly' independent films unassociated with Hollywood, catering to a more laid-back atmosphere that rejects the corporate trappings often associated with larger festivals. It has become a refuge for filmmakers who may not find a place within the increasingly mainstream-oriented Sundance. Director Myles Berkowitz, rejected by Sundance, expressed gratitude for Slamdance, noting that the movies at Sundance often feature named actors and substantial budgets, making it challenging for first-time directors to compete.⁴⁰

While Sundance continues to dominate the independent film landscape, these parallel festivals, conceived out of protest and the need for a different approach, have added layers of diversity, ensuring that the independent spirit thrives in various forms. The emergence of these festivals demonstrates that as soon as a festival becomes too established, a new, more audacious venue will emerge to fill the gap at the bottom, perpetuating a cycle of innovation and defiance within the independent film community. While there may always be an Other, there will always be a place where they will be welcomed in, as Sundance Film Festival had always intended.

In conclusion, Sundance Film Festival's evolution from an indie celebration to a global industry phenomenon has led to a nuanced landscape within independent cinema. The examination of Sundance's pivotal era during the 1990s provides crucial insights into the evolution of independent cinema and the dynamics of the film industry. While the festival's commercial success has benefitted independent filmmakers, it also raised concerns about prioritising commercially viable projects over diverse voices. The new festivals that arose from the tension embody the ongoing struggle in the independent film community to balance innovation with industry realities, but also underscores the resilience of the independent film community in seeking inclusivity and diversity. By exploring the interplay between artistic expression and commercial interests, this chapter elucidates the complexities inherent in maintaining alternative spaces within an increasingly commercialised industry, echoing philosophical concerns of Derrida and Levinas. This cycle of innovation and defiance reaffirms that, despite industry shifts, there will always be a welcoming space for the Other, preserving the independent ethos that initially inspired Sundance.

⁴⁰ Levy, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

Chapter Three: The ‘Othering’ of Women at Sundance

As evidenced in the previous chapters, independent cinema can be considered an Other to Hollywood. While independent filmmakers are given less opportunity than those with profit-making agendas, female independent filmmakers fare even worse. The commercial support and industry help necessary to create a film that can and will be seen by audiences is far less for female directors. By examining box office records and statistics from production companies it is evident that while more is being done to promote independent cinema, the majority of its successful films are being made by straight white males. Of the top fifty highest-grossing independent films worldwide, only three were directed by women⁴¹. This chapter explores how gender bias affects women in film, how the Sundance Film Festival and the Sundance Institute have attempted to work towards gender parity, and whether or not their efforts have been successful in uplifting women as Others. Through the readings of authors such as B. Ruby Rich, film critic and curator/selector/juror at Sundance⁴², and Veronica Pravadelli, professor of film studies and prominent author of feminist film theory⁴³, this chapter examines the need for a space dedicated to women to explore artistic endeavours with industry support. It poses the question if, in aiming to create a more inclusive space in independent filmmaking in terms of gender, there is another group that is inevitably excluded, hence becoming the new Other.

Historically, Hollywood has perpetuated a systemic imbalance in opportunities between male and female filmmakers. However, the landscape within independent cinema has shown more promise in addressing this disparity by striving to create spaces for underrepresented voices. For example, despite only 4.8% of the highest-grossing films since 2007 being directed by women, narrative independent films boast a significantly higher representation, with 34.5% of them helmed by female directors⁴⁴. While this figure falls short of achieving gender parity, it marks a notable advancement compared to the mainstream industry's record. However, there still remains considerable work to be done within the independent sector to attain balanced gender representation.

This chapter discusses the barrier of the perception of women as an Other. Simone De Beauvoir argues that women have historically been viewed as the Other, marginalised and defined in relation to men. De Beauvoir emphasises the importance of recognising women as individuals with their own

⁴¹ “Ranking of highest-grossing independent movies worldwide as of October 2023.” *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1375655/highest-grossing-independent-movies-worldwide/>. Accessed 28 February 2024.

⁴² “B. Ruby Rich.” *UC Santa Cruz*, https://film.ucsc.edu/faculty/b_ruby_rich. Accessed 4 December 2023.

⁴³ “About The Author.” *University of Illinois Press*, <https://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/?id=p080340>. Accessed 4 December 2023.

⁴⁴ “Gender distribution of directors in TV and film in the United States from 2007 to 2019, by media platform.” *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/656433/gender-distribution-directors-media-platform/>. Accessed 28 February 2024.

agency and subjectivity, rather than simply as objects or extensions of men.⁴⁵ This can be viewed in relation to female independent filmmakers as an Other to their male counterparts, perpetuating a status quo that hampers the progress of women in key creative positions. Despite advancements in the numbers of female producers and writers since the 1980s, women still significantly lag behind their male counterparts in holding key creative positions. In 2023, 75% of the highest-grossing films enlisted ten or more men as directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers, yet only 4% featured ten or more women in equivalent positions⁴⁶. The stagnation in the representation of female directors, cinematographers, and editors points to persistent biases that prevent the full integration of women into these roles.

A major challenge female filmmakers experience is the uneven representation of genders within film festivals, exemplified by the Sundance Film Festival. Despite occasional strides towards gender parity, particularly highlighted by a record achievement in 2013 of equal amounts of female and male directors in both the dramatic and documentary categories, the broader narrative reveals a stark discrepancy between the experiences of women and their male counterparts in the independent film industry.⁴⁷ The disappointment in the main US competitions regarding female directors underscores an enduring struggle for female filmmakers. During Sundance's economic boom in the 1990s as discussed in Chapter Two, not a single winner of the Grand Jury Prize was female. This was a setback to the progress made the decade previously, with four female winners including Nancy Savoca in 1989 with *True Love* (1989), the year that catapulted Stephen Soderbergh to fame and success.⁴⁸ This prompts a critical examination of the barriers that hinder their creative possibilities in a competitive industry.

As a barometer of indie filmmaking trends, Sundance has reflected notable progress for women filmmakers. While Hollywood still grappled with male dominance, Sundance has demonstrated a more hospitable environment, particularly for first-time women directors. Between 1985 and 1999, 20% of the dramatic features were directed by women. The festival celebrated a landmark in 2000, with 40% of candidates in the dramatic competition being women.⁴⁹ While notorious for the beginning of careers of many famous male auteurs like Richard Linklater and Kevin Smith, it also has given the opportunity for many female filmmakers to debut their films. One of the most successful

⁴⁵ Beauvoir, op.cit., p. 15.

⁴⁶ Lauzen, Martha M. *The Celluloid Ceiling: Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Top Grossing U.S. Films in 2023*. San Diego State University, 2024, p.1.

⁴⁷ White, Patricia. "Age Appropriate? Sundance's Women Filmmakers Come Next." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2013, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Pravadelli, Veronica. "US Independent Women's Cinema, Sundance Girls, and Identity Politics." *Feminisms : Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, edited by Anna Backman Rogers and Laura Mulvey, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, p. 150.

⁴⁹ Levy, op.cit., p. 348.

premieres came from Rose Troche with her film *Go Fish* (1994). With only \$66,000 in its budget, it went on to achieve an unprecedented level of success after its Sundance premiere, propelled by word-of-mouth acclaim prior to its screening. It was also marketed towards a niche lesbian audience, in the subject of the film itself and by being released around the 25th anniversary of Stonewall during Pride month. This promotion of a unique voice discovered its audience by unabashedly identifying as an Other. By representing a perspective that hadn't been widely depicted on screen, it appealed to a group of Others in its audience. It grossed \$2.4 million at the box office, showing the commercial viability of a uniquely female voice.⁵⁰ The festival's evolution into a more inclusive space reflects Foucault's emphasis on challenging traditional power structures and expanding opportunities for those traditionally relegated to the margins⁵¹. Through institutional support and personal belief in these films, Sundance empowers filmmakers to assert their unique identities and challenge prevailing norms, echoing Beauvoir's call for the liberation of all individuals from societal constraints.

However, this success proved to be ephemeral for Troche and several other female directors. Despite a promising start for many women in independent filmmaking, a pattern of rapid decline often follows their initial successes. After the success of *Go Fish*, Troche was awarded with \$8 million for her next project by Warner Brothers. However, after refusing to include a more optimistic ending, the executives withdrew their support and condemned it straight to a video release from the studio.⁵² Similarly in the early 1990s, with notable releases like Martha Coolidge's *Rambling Rose* (1991), Allison Anders's *Gas Food Lodging* (1992), Stacy Cochran's *My New Gun* (1992), and Nancy Savoca's *Household Saints* (1993), it appeared that women were making a significant impact on the indie scene. However, for women filmmakers, the transition from the first to the second film is notably more challenging, with wider intervals between releases compared to their male counterparts. Sundance, while initially friendly to first-time women directors, has seen instances where these subsequent films by prominent women like Allison Anders and Nancy Savoca failed to show progress, receiving lukewarm receptions for their follow-ups.⁵³ This pattern provides a stark contrast to male filmmakers' subsequent career trajectories after Sundance successes, for example the Coen brothers' with *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Despite not entirely aligning with Sundance's independent ethos, their work was embraced and endorsed by the festival due to their established reputation. This illustrates a gender bias against women, who did not receive equal levels of support. Even the women who were given a glimpse of success were still treated as an Other without sustained institutional

⁵⁰ Lane, Christina. "Just another girl outside the neo-indie." *Contemporary American Independent Film : From the Margins to the Mainstream*, edited by Christine Holmlund, and Justin Wyatt, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004, p. 202.

⁵¹ Rajchman, op.cit., p. 111.

⁵² Lane, op.cit., p. 197.

⁵³ Levy, op.cit., p. 404.

support, underscoring the importance of challenging power structures that perpetuate the Othering of women.

Despite its efforts to champion the underdog and welcome women, Sundance grapples with the challenging task of creating a truly level playing field in the competitive and dynamic film marketplace.⁵⁴ Both the Sundance Film Festival and the Sundance Institute actively pursue gender parity within independent filmmaking through various initiatives and collaborative efforts which extend to addressing barriers and opportunities for independent women filmmakers. The success of the Sundance labs is attributed to their adherence to the principles of proper arts funding. The labs are managed fairly and professionally by a skilled team, with a noteworthy representation of women and feminists among their experienced staff. The labs prioritise individual vision and innovation, fostering an environment that is “free from commercial and political pressures”.⁵⁵ It is in these environments that the true potential of female filmmakers can be seen, when the correct support is provided and they are not hindered by their own gender identity.

The Sundance Institute's role in presenting research and fostering dialogue marked a distinctive element in promoting gender equality. They launched The Women Filmmakers Initiative in 2013 in partnership with Women in Film Los Angeles, aiming to address the unequal representation of women and men behind the camera. This non-profit organization, wielding considerable influence, analysed gender representation in Sundance to find where the problems lay. While almost 40% of the participants in the feature film and documentary labs were women, only 16% of the directors who made it to the festival were female – still a figure double that of the box office.⁵⁶ Men and women were completing and exhibiting films at the same rate. However, once the support of the labs was gone, the institutional issues whereby women were perceived as an Other to men and not afforded equal opportunities to find an audience still persisted.

Recognising the need for sustained change, the Sundance Institute announced the creation of the Gamechanger fund for women filmmakers, a significant step towards providing financial support and opportunities. This new fund, spearheaded by respected producer Mary Jane Skalski, aimed to address the financial and structural barriers that women often face in the film industry. As the Sundance Film Festival continues to serve as a vital platform for independent filmmakers, initiatives like the

⁵⁴ Rich, B. Ruby. “Sundance At Thirty.” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2013, p. 85.

⁵⁵ White, op.cit., p. 84.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 83.

Gamechanger fund hold the promise of being a transformative force, potentially reshaping the landscape and fostering lasting change for women in independent filmmaking.⁵⁷

While some success for women has occurred at Sundance, the promotion of female filmmakers at the festival has, at times, overlooked the intersectionality of identity categories, particularly concerning race. The inclusion of white women and the progress being made to advance their careers is undoubtedly positive, however, there is yet another Other created when successes are primarily seen amongst white women. In the early years of feminist cinema, the focus on women's oppression as a universal experience gave way to a more nuanced understanding in the 1980s. Women of colour and lesbians began challenging the framework of second-wave feminism⁵⁸, emphasising the need to consider race and sexual preference alongside gender. However, the representation of diverse identities in female-directed films at Sundance hasn't always reflected this intersectionality.⁵⁹

In the realm of women directors, a notable lack of racial diversity persists. The first black female winner of the Best Director Prize at Sundance didn't come until 2012, when Ava DuVernay took home the award for her film *Middle of Nowhere* (2012). For the first black winner to achieve this success thirty four years after the festival began raises questions about the racial homogeneity of the jury's decisions at Sundance, and highlights the need for an examination of the selection process. The marketing strategies for films by women directors can also be blamed for the struggle in getting films by women of colour seen by failing to recognise the potential of niche audiences. Instances like the side-lining of Rose Troche's Latina identity in the marketing campaign for *Go Fish* highlight missed opportunities to engage diverse audiences effectively and represent the Other. While openly being promoted as a lesbian film, her Puerto Rican heritage was conveniently kept quiet in attempts by the producers to appeal to more 'universal' audiences.⁶⁰ These issues underscore the ongoing challenges of promoting inclusivity and diverse representation in the promotion of female filmmakers, which further entrenches the Otherness of women of colour. By failing to recognise and cater to the unique experiences of women of colour within the industry, yet again creating another Other, a perpetual cycle of Otherness is solidified.

In conclusion, the landscape of independent cinema, as epitomised by the Sundance Film Festival, remains a complex battleground for female filmmakers. Despite the comparatively more inclusive

⁵⁷ Rich, B. Ruby. "Sundance." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2012, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Second-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, focused primarily on gender equality and women's liberation from social, political, and economic oppression. However, it often overlooked the intersecting factors of race and sexuality, leading to criticisms of its failure to address the unique challenges faced by women of colour and those within the LGBTQ+ community.

⁵⁹ Pravadelli, op.cit., p. 150.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 151.

environment of independent cinema in contrast to Hollywood, the treatment of women as an Other within Sundance Film Festival and the broader film industry perpetuates a status quo that hinders the full integration of women into key creative positions. While Sundance has made efforts to promote gender parity and inclusivity, significant challenges remain, particularly in terms of uneven representation. This chapter has highlighted the enduring institutional biases that hinder women filmmakers' access to audiences and opportunities beyond initial successes, perpetuating their status as the Other. Moreover, it emphasises the importance of recognising intersectionality in promoting inclusivity and diverse representation within the industry. However, amidst these challenges, initiatives organised by Sundance to overcome structural and financial barriers signal the potential for lasting change in independent cinema. By underscoring the ongoing struggle for gender equality and diverse representation within the industry, the need for sustained efforts to address institutional biases and create more inclusive spaces for underrepresented voices is emphasised. The industry's inability to provide lasting support and foster meaningful change for women in independent filmmaking must be addressed in order to fully progress into an era of truly diverse independent cinema, where there is space for all Others.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the treatment of independent films within the larger Hollywood industry, and how Sundance was a player in the rise of their popularity and improving their commercial viability. Independent cinema uses and explores voices from all backgrounds, yet independent filmmakers are inherently considered to be Others. Through the examination of works of philosophers as well as important investigations into independent film practice, the context of the Other within film industries can be seen, and its presence should be acknowledged. By examining the key theories of a variety of philosophers such as Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, and De Beauvoir, the importance of the Sundance Film Festival for independent filmmakers becomes apparent.

Chapter One delved into the vital role of incorporating outsider voices into mainstream cinema, with a specific focus on the Sundance Film Festival and its impact on independent filmmaking. Examining the historical context of indie film highlighted the necessity of platforms like Sundance for showcasing diverse narratives. Sundance, guided by Robert Redford's vision, has been pivotal in challenging mainstream narratives and nurturing talent beyond Hollywood's confines. This aligns with Levinas' concept of the Other, emphasising ethical responsibility towards marginalised perspectives. Sundance's dedication to diversity and talent cultivation embodies inclusivity and empathy, fostering a more equitable film industry. Reflecting on Sundance's journey underscores storytelling's power to unite and celebrate our shared human experience. Its success in amplifying marginalised voices emphasises the importance of integrating outsiders into mainstream cinema, enriching it with diverse narratives and perspectives.

Chapter Two has provided a comprehensive exploration of Sundance Film Festival's transformative journey throughout the 1990s. It has highlighted the festival's remarkable growth from a modest gathering of independent filmmakers to a global cultural phenomenon. This period of evolution was marked by both triumphs and challenges, as Sundance navigated the increasing influence of commercial interests while striving to maintain its commitment to artistic integrity and inclusivity. This chapter underscored the complexities inherent in maintaining alternative spaces for Others within an industry driven by commercial imperatives, emphasising the ongoing struggle to balance artistic innovation with economic realities. It perpetuated the ongoing need for alternative spaces in the form of parallel festivals, focused on championing work created by true outsiders, untouched by the capitalistic motive of Hollywood. Overall, Chapter Two illuminates the evolving landscape of independent cinema and reaffirms the importance of spaces like Sundance in giving voices to those usually dismissed and highlights the tenacity of the independent film community in seeking inclusivity and diversity.

Chapter Three explored the intricate dynamics of gender representation within independent cinema, particularly focusing on the experiences of female filmmakers within Sundance. Despite the openness of independent cinema to diverse voices comparatively to Hollywood, women filmmakers continue to face significant barriers and systemic patriarchal biases, relegating them to the status of the Other within the industry. The chapter has underscored the enduring institutional biases that hinder women filmmakers' access to resources, audiences, and opportunities beyond their initial successes, perpetuating their marginalisation within the industry and echoing De Beauvoir's analysis of women as Others. Moreover, it has highlighted the importance of recognising intersectionality in promoting inclusivity and diverse representation within the film industry. While Sundance's initiatives signal progress in addressing structural and financial barriers to women, sustained efforts are needed to create truly inclusive spaces for underrepresented voices. Only through concerted efforts to address institutional biases and create equitable opportunities can the independent cinema landscape truly evolve into a space where all voices are heard and valued.

Sundance was established with the explicit purpose of providing a platform for voices that had historically been marginalised and overlooked, the voices of independent filmmakers. The crux of independent cinema is to capture the full spectrum of society, presenting stories and characters that reflect the richness and diversity of human existence, honouring all Others. Its mission is not merely to entertain audiences but to challenge them, to broaden their perspectives, and to foster empathy and understanding across diverse experiences. Indie cinema seeks to amplify the voices of individuals who diverged from the dominant societal archetype, namely the white heterosexual male. It recognised that the concept of the Other is multifaceted, encompassing a multitude of identities and lived realities that diverge from the perceived norm. By showcasing stories from a diverse array of storytellers, Sundance sought to dismantle stereotypes, break down barriers, and invite audiences into a deeper exploration of the human condition. The imperative of inclusivity within storytelling extends beyond mere appeasement; it is rooted in the fundamental principle of human empathy, born from the ability of individuals to recognise aspects of themselves in others. Films play a pivotal role in facilitating this profound connection by presenting diverse characters and narratives that allow audiences to engage with perspectives beyond their own lived experiences. Through this process of reflection and introspection, cinema can serve as a powerful tool for illuminating the human experience, offering narratives that resonate with audiences on a deeply personal level. By promoting such connections, film cultivates a more empathetic and understanding view of humanity as a whole.

This thesis unequivocally underscores the unwavering tenacity of individuals marginalised as Others, not solely within the realm of cinema but across broader societal landscapes. Sundance emerged as a beacon of inclusion, beckoning those on the fringes of the film industry – independent filmmakers –

into its fold. Yet, amidst its triumphs, Sundance encountered formidable obstacles in the forms of commercialism and patriarchal structures. Despite the resultant exclusion of even more marginalised voices, these challenges served as crucibles, affirming the indomitable spirit of these creators and their unyielding faith in their craft. While Sundance may have at times faltered in its capacity to fully embrace them, they forged their own paths. Although the inclusion of one Other often contributes to a perpetual cycle of creating another Other, there is always somewhere else for an outsider to be welcomed, in film and beyond.

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