

The Profitable Purity of Robert Redford:  
Authenticity, Auteur Capital, and the Sundance Film Festival

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## ABSTRACT

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Matthew King

This thesis, through the relationship between actor-director Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival, examines the dynamic between filmmakers and film festivals, and the effect the former can have on the latter's public perception. Scholarship on the ties between festivals and filmmakers has been limited, often using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus to focus on the festival's ability to imbue a director with legitimacy and capital. While this study also uses Bourdieu's theories as a foundation for understanding film festivals, it ultimately filters these concepts through a lens of star and auteur studies to look at the relationship the other way around: that is, how an auteur-star like Redford might affect a festival like Sundance, both economically and culturally. Through closely examining the constructed images of both Redford and Sundance, this study posits that the actor-director brings his prestige and legitimacy—that is, his *auteur capital*—to bear on the Festival, and therefore affects its public understanding, as well as its values, norms, and practices. Sundance is a bundle of contradictions, each of which points to a habitus of paradoxical beliefs in Redford, which, in turn, reflects and reinforces a dominant society built out of oppositional forces. By comprehending how the public vision of festivals like Sundance can be affected by the popular perception of auteur-stars like Redford, this thesis will further bring light to the economic, political, and cultural relationships and hierarchies at work in such events.

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## Introduction

How does one begin to understand a film festival? How can we comprehend the kind of power dynamics, economics, and culture at play in a festival's relationship to its filmmakers? How do these ubiquitous events survive, thrive, and set themselves apart from the pack? What happens when a filmmaker of some repute—the kind critics, scholars, and film fanatics might call an *auteur*—becomes publicly involved in a film festival? This thesis tackles these questions, analyzing the relationship between filmmakers and film festivals, and the effect the former can have on the latter's public perception. To examine this dynamic, I will use the relationship between actor-director Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival as a case study, arguing that Redford brings his prestige and reputation to bear on the Festival, and therefore affects the public understanding of Sundance, its values, norms, and practices.

In late January 2018, the Sundance Film Festival celebrates its fortieth anniversary since its inception in 1978 by Sterling Van Wagenen. However, there is likely to be very little fanfare over the date. This, after all, would detract from the Festival's public image, tied as it is to the multi-hyphenate filmmaker and star, the president and co-founder of the Sundance Institute, Robert Redford. In a *Hollywood Reporter* profile by Stephen Galloway, Redford is described as having created the Sundance Film Festival. While this is factually incorrect, it might as well be true, given the deep connections the filmmaker and festival share in the public eye. In addition to the questions above, this thesis asks, what does this relationship, between Redford and Sundance, do to how we understand the Festival? As I argue, Robert Redford's persona as a filmmaker and performer has been constructed around several interconnected themes: America, masculinity, wilderness, and authenticity. Knowing this, how then does this manifest in the Festival itself? How is Redford's persona—as an entity with his own values and beliefs—present in the Festival?

In the press release announcing the 2018 competition lineup, Redford is quoted as saying, “The work of independent storytellers can challenge and possibly change culture, illuminating our world's imperfections and possibilities.” Here, in a nutshell, we find the publicly acknowledged motivation for the Festival, built as it is around notions of independence, counterculture, changing the world, and even Robert Redford. It is a Romantic vision, one

steeped in American history. Every January, filmmakers march into the woods of Utah to take part in a festival of purity—that autonomous independence of which Redford speaks. In the programming for the Festival’s 2018 competition, you will find stories of KKK members learning to love, a post-apocalyptic story of friendship, a kindergarten teacher helping a gifted student, and even the story of not-so-family-friendly killer Lizzie Borden. Ethan Hawke reveals his directorial debut, meanwhile, and other films draw stars to the Festival, with Jon Hamm, Rosamund Pike, Paul Rudd, Jeff Daniels, Paul Giamatti, Keira Knightley, Robert Pattinson, Jack Black, Colin Firth, and numerous other A-listers filling the films’ rosters. Smaller movies in the NEXT category premiere alongside showcase pieces from mega-producers Scott Rudin and Judd Apatow. The Festival this year is sure to deliver independent cinema—that is, films without the official production backing of studios, whose subjects are perhaps not always the stuff of franchises or other well-known intellectual properties. However, it is also sure to deliver the hits that, while they may not be about superheroes and they perhaps even subvert certain expectations, are not abandoning commercial potential, narrative, and the names that bring box office possibility.

This dynamic has long been the case with Sundance. At the Festival, you can expect a mix of science-fiction/fantasy—films such as Shane Carruth’s *Primer* (2004) and Charlie McDowell’s *The One I Love* (2014)—that tell otherworldly stories that bend the mind and twist viewers’ expectations. The Festival also, however, delivers a smattering of social melodrama—examples over the years include Lee Daniels’s *Precious* (2009) starring then unknown Gabourey Sidibe and bestselling pop singer, Mariah Carey, as well as John Slattery’s *God’s Pocket* (2014) starring Philip Seymour Hoffman in one of his final roles. You will see films that star no one you have heard of—such as Chloe Zhao’s *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (2015), Benh Zeitlin’s *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), and others—and movies that star every actor you can recognize—see the above list of performers appearing at the 2018 Festival. This dynamic is fundamental to Sundance’s own constructed image, with a wide variety of films programmed, whose styles and narratives are seemingly disparate, yet somehow coherent. In this regard, however, Sundance is ripe for critical analysis. What do the programmed films have in common, and what do their contradictions say about Sundance? What purpose does programming films with both stars *and* non-professional actors do in the grand scheme of Sundance?

In 2015, *Dope* premiered, telling the story of Malcolm, a young African-American who has trouble balancing his real interests with the realities forced upon him by his Los Angeles neighbourhood. The film's most famous faces were Zoë Kravitz and rapper A\$AP Rocky. It was a clever, playful, high-energy film, one that pointed to an arguably underrepresented part of American life. Premiering alongside it was *Me, and Earl and the Dying Girl*, which told the story of Greg, who enjoys remaking art films with his friend Earl. Inevitably, as the title suggests, a girl shows up in the story and dies. The film was directed by Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, and featured young unknowns Thomas Mann and RJ Cyler, alongside comedy giants Nick Offerman and Molly Shannon. Again, the film was clever and emotionally effective, and it even plays around with the aesthetic expectations of a young adult property (based as it was on a YA novel). Both *Dope* and *Me, and Earl* gesture at subversion, and yet still cater largely to hegemonic modes of cinema. Of course, that summary—a film that points to counter-cultural ideas or aesthetics, while happily indulging in a largely dominant narrative form—works for many Sundance films, if not all. It is as if the selection is wide, but not particularly deep, each hovering around the same frequency of meaning, and many including contradictions themselves. With that said, it is still a relatively varied slate of programming.

Which returns to my initial question of how do we understand the Festival, in particular in the face of such seeming variety? My quick answer to that question is Robert Redford, who, over his lengthy career, has accrued plenty of prestige and respect in his career—or rather, what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls *cultural capital*. Exploring what that might mean—that is, how Redford's constructed persona becomes a means of comprehending the varied codes of Sundance—this thesis approaches this relationship by looking at how such a dynamic not only allows for understanding, but also further reinforces a patriarchal power steeped in American masculinity and a Romantic vision of authenticity.

Before diving into Sundance, however, I will first lay a theoretical groundwork in my first chapter using Bourdieu's theory of fields, capital, and habitus. This thesis lies at a unique crossroads between festival and star studies. In taking up this position, my research will draw new parallels between disciplines that enormously overlap in reality, but have had very little intersection in scholarship. As noted, I argue that, in keeping with many others in the field of film festival studies, Bourdieu's sociological theories are helpful in understanding the web of social agents involved in film festivals. Where I differ, however, is in assigning his terms to



specific agents. This becomes especially clear in my approach to auteurs, whom myself and others argue are the stars of film festivals. In this light, I begin to approach film directors from a star studies angle, bringing Richard Dyer's own method to bear on festival-attending auteurs. I also break down the concept of the star-as-brand, which brings the discussion back to Bourdieu, as I make my argument that auteurs with long-term relationships to festivals can have an impact, consciously or otherwise, on the public perception, but also the beliefs, values, and norms of a Festival, thereby acting as the habitus to the Festival's field. This, in turn, leads to my case study on Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival.

In my second chapter, I begin this study with a close analysis of Robert Redford's *star image*, to borrow Dyer's term. Before examining how Redford's persona has been constructed, I will offer a historical analysis of authenticity, looking at how such a concept became mired in masculine fantasies of wilderness in the United States. This provides a foundation for understanding Redford's projected identity, which is constructed around concepts of authenticity, masculinity, wilderness, and America. With this in mind, then, I will offer analysis of Michael Feeney Callan's biography of Redford, along with some other journalistic accounts, to see how Redford's image is being put together. Redford's persona is further made clear through his work as an actor and director, and my analysis of his stardom and authorial persona in six of his films brings further illumination to the Redfordian construction. Here, we begin to see the contradictions at the heart of Redford, the ones that paradoxically act critically towards the dominant ideology, all the while supporting it fervently. In Redford's persona, we find a habitus with specific dispositions, values, beliefs, and contradictions, and as such, it is the perfect foundation for Sundance to build itself upon and in which the public can understand it.

In the third chapter, I examine the Sundance Film Festival, following similar patterns to how I approached Redford. What, after all, is the identity of the Sundance Film Festival? Following my theory of the filmmaker-as-habitus, what are the practices and behaviours that come from its Redfordian values and beliefs? The chapter begins with an analysis of the academic literature available on the Festival, before moving onto more popular literature. What is the public record of Sundance's history? What journalistic accounts are there? Here, we begin to see the image of Sundance and how it is constructed in the public eye. In order to develop this image, I will analyze what Sundance is saying about itself. In this section, I will offer a close reading of the Festival's promotional materials, such as its website and program guides, and

examine its geographical location. In setting itself in Utah, away from Hollywood machinations and nestled in the purportedly pure woods of America, what is Sundance saying about itself? I will end the chapter with an analysis of some of the Festival's programming, closely reading two prominent Sundance debuts: Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). Throughout this chapter, Robert Redford's connection to the festival, as an influence and its habitus, become more and more solid and certain.

The Sundance Film Festival is one of the largest in the cinematic world. It is responsible for launching the careers of many, and as such, acceptance from it is highly sought after, with thousands upon thousands of submissions coming every year from all over the world. It is important, therefore, to understand it in its economic, social, and cultural operations. My concept of *auteur capital*, which I will introduce in the first chapter, in addition to Bourdieu's habitus, become useful ways of talking about and comprehending the complex ties between certain filmmakers and film festivals, as well as the hierarchical placement of festivals against one another. As I argue, Sundance, as with other festivals, is a bundle of contradictions, which point to a habitus of paradoxical beliefs, that reflect and reinforce a society of oppositional forces. In exploring the specific forces at work in Sundance and Robert Redford, this thesis will offer a key to understanding other, similar festivals that work in kind. By understanding how the public vision of festivals like Sundance can be affected by the popular perception of stars like Redford—a dynamic not present in all festivals, I hasten to add—we can further bring light to the economic, political, and cultural relationships at work in such events.

## **Chapter 1: Film Festivals, Capital, and the Auteur-Brand**

Film festivals, as cultural events with prestige attached, offer a wide variety of angles for close study. There are the economics of film festivals, and the money that flits in and out of the festival's doors, the honour that brings people from all over the world dressed in immaculate tuxedos and gowns. As filmmakers and stars sometimes travel from the other side of the globe to attend a festival, there are also the questions of globalization and even tourism that may play into a festival's study. The Sundance Film Festival, this thesis's chief case study, is an event that brings people from countries such as the United Kingdom, Brazil, Iran, and others. While people may not stand in tuxedos at Sundance, they nevertheless appear for photos in front of sponsors. Money pours into the small mountain town of Park City, Utah as the Festival carries on every January, before swiftly departing and taking much of its treasures with it. This is not strictly my approach to the Festival. In studying film festivals, I aim to approach the economic side of the conversation *through* the cultural side, looking at the hierarchies that present themselves with respect to the presence of the *auteur* at festivals. This, in turn, leads to discussion of fiscal and artistic relationships, and more. As I argue, Robert Redford, as an auteur and star of significant repute, brings his own persona and prestige to the Sundance Film Festival, and thereby affects its entire identity, economically and culturally. However, as I approach festivals with this in mind, I must first locate how the festival has been treated within scholarship. This, in turn, will offer a foundation from which to understand Sundance as both part of the larger festival network, as well as an entity with its own unique set of values and practices.

With such extensive research possibilities, one can see how, over the past three decades, film festival scholarship has steadily increased. Whereas before, as Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong notes, "discussion of festivals ... remained for the most part the domain of journalists and memoirs, institutional practitioners and festival publications" (3), now, the academic study of film festivals has become a robust field of research. This is perhaps best exemplified by Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck's vast Film Festival Research Network (FFRN), which provides a lengthy and highly detailed bibliography for festival analysis (Wong 3). However, while film festival scholarship has expanded impressively since the 2000s, the actual relationship between a festival and one of its chief stakeholders—that is, the filmmakers themselves—has not been pored over extensively by academics. This is a tremendous oversight, considering that, within

today's global field of art cinema, neither festival nor filmmaker can truly survive without the other. Film careers are often born at and sustained through festivals, where filmmakers are blessed and sainted as auteurs, before being welcomed into the canon of global art cinema<sup>1</sup>. Festivals, in turn, can reach whole new levels of publicized prestige and authenticity when the filmmakers—an embodied presence of filmmaking and cinephilia—show up to talk about their film. This is not to say that there have not been any analyses of this relationship, but rather that, for the most part, they have remained focused on only one direction in the dynamic—that is, how festivals affect filmmakers.

In *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power*, for example, Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong primarily focuses on how the film festival aids in disseminating information on a filmmaker and thereby contributes to forming perception of that person's career. In her book's third chapter, "Auteurs, Critics, and Canons: Extratextual Elements and the Construction of Festival Films," Wong builds her argument around the careers of Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni and Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami. Wong analyzes how each auteur's relationship to film festivals—in particular, to awards at film festivals—contributes to how the media and the cinephiliac community approach the filmmaker's career and place in the canon of art cinema. Wong writes,

the main roles associated with film festivals are to launch new cinemas—individual films, auteurs, traditions, and movements—and to reproduce and add value to these films and their affiliates. The former is managed by selection; the latter process means continued invitation of auteurial films to festivals and competitions, selection of filmmakers as jurors, and hosting critical panels and retrospectives. (101-2)

For Wong, film festivals are able to shine a light on filmmakers deemed culturally legitimate, lending prestige and recognition to their careers, but also guiding discourse, interpretation, and relevant value judgments of a filmmaker's work and identity. These are salient, credible points. Certainly, as Wong presents, Antonioni and Kiarostami are two filmmakers of many whose

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<sup>1</sup> A canon that, over 100 plus years of cinema, has remained largely dominated by male directors from the Global North, something that film festivals have unfortunately, consciously or otherwise, reinforced through selection and prizing, with certain exceptions. I will elaborate on this, in relation to the Sundance Film Festival, in my third chapter.

careers have been redirected or affected by the blessing given them by festivals such as Cannes, Locarno, Venice, and others. One can see this in the case of the Sundance Film Festival, too, and the countless filmmakers, such as Steven Soderbergh and Quentin Tarantino,<sup>2</sup> whose careers have started and first gained traction at the Festival. However, while festivals may bring light to the work of certain filmmakers, acting as a tastemaker and gatekeeper for global art cinema, there is another side to that discussion that Wong does not highlight: what about the inverse of this relationship? How can a filmmaker affect the success and canonization of film festivals, and bring her own reputation to bear on the festivals themselves? Without this other angle, Wong's approach limits how we see the proliferation of certain festivals over others, and how we understand the struggle for power between filmmakers and festivals, as well as between film festivals themselves. Film festivals compete with one another, after all, chasing after premieres from respected directors and red carpet photo calls with glitzy stars. When certain filmmakers become attached, it can deeply impact how we understand not only the filmmakers, but also the festivals, and their place in the film festival network. Wong, however, is not alone in this analytic angle, and thus this limitation.

Marijke de Valck, in her work, approaches the festival-filmmaker relationship in a similar fashion to Wong, and as such her argument and focus carry many of the same limitations. She sees the festival's relationship to filmmakers as the former offering prestige to the latter, and not necessarily the other way around. De Valck supports her argument using the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, whose sociological work certainly aids in understanding the power dynamics between festival and director, and how the festival can affect a filmmaker's career. In her essays "Fostering Art, Adding Value, Cultivating Taste: Film Festivals as Sites of Cultural Legitimization" and "Film Festivals, Bourdieu, and the Economization of Culture," de Valck lays out three key Bourdieusian concepts—*field*, *capital*, and *habitus*—and applies them to film festivals. In order to understand de Valck's argument and its limitations, along with the dynamic between Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival, I will explore these concepts.

### **Bourdieu at the Movies: Field, Capital, and Habitus**

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<sup>2</sup> I explore these filmmakers' debuts, Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape* and Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*, in this thesis's third chapter.

As I will explore later in this thesis, the relationship between Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival began early on in 1978, when Redford was named chairman of the board. However, he became more associated with the Festival in 1985 when his Sundance Institute took on its management, and then even more so in 1991 when the Festival officially took on the Sundance name. What does this association between Redford and Sundance do to how we, the public, understand the Festival? How does Redford, in this association, affect the practices and programming of Sundance? For this, I turn to Pierre Bourdieu, whose theories of field, capital, and habitus, as I have said, offer an excellent way to cohere these two entities, in addition to understand de Valck's own formulation.

In "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," Bourdieu defines the artistic field as "a field of positions and a field of position-takings" (34). In this sense, it is akin to a network, in which various social agents and actors relate to and interact with one another. Patricia Thomson helpfully describes Bourdieu's field as "the *social space* in which interactions, transactions and events occurred" (67). Bourdieu further characterizes the artistic field as consisting of two poles—on one side, there is the *heteronomous* principle, and on the other, the *autonomous* principle. "[T]he *heteronomous* principle of hierarchization," Bourdieu writes, "... is *success*, as measured by indices such as book sales, number of theatrical performances, etc. or honours, appointments, etc. The *autonomous* principle of hierarchization ... is *degree specific consecration* (literary or artistic prestige)" ("Field" 38). For Bourdieu, this artistic field is always at war with itself, a permanent "site of a struggle between two principles of hierarchization" ("Field" 40). If the artistic field leans more heavily towards being autonomous—that is, the more it adheres to its own logic and system of beliefs—then that field will accrue more symbolic, if not entirely economic, power ("Field" 38). Bourdieu stipulates that these characteristics distinguish artistic fields from other fields: in an ideally autonomous "field of cultural production," he writes, "where the only audience aimed at is other producers ... the economy of practices is based, as in a generalized game of 'loser wins', on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies" ("Field" 39). However, Bourdieu stresses that this artistic field, despite its reach towards autonomy, is still "affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of *economic* and *political* profit" ("Field" 39, my emphasis).

Bourdieu's notion of *field* translates relatively well to the film festival event itself, as both an artistic field of cultural production, as well as reproduction. Indeed, the autonomous-heteronomous dichotomy is evident throughout film festivals' history, reaching back as far as 1932 when the first reported film festival took place in Venice. The Mostra Cinematografica de Venezia was formed at the behest of Benito Mussolini's Fascist government (Kredell 15; Wong 37; de Valck 2007, 47), which considered cinema as both an art form as well as a propagandistic opportunity to bolster Italy's cultural image (Wong 37). Right away, then, one can see the dual purpose with which film festivals have operated, as both an autonomous event and outlet for similarly autonomous art, as well as something more heteronomous—as in Venice's case, which was blatantly tied to political aims and not simply art for art's sake. Cannes, meanwhile, was formed on the eve of the Second World War as a political rejoinder and counter to Italy's increasingly Fascist-sympathizing festival (de Valck 2007, 48; Loist 54).

As film festivals became more and more ubiquitous, this autonomous-heteronomous struggle continued, the dual purpose between artistic and political or economic principles firmly entrenched in how, or even why, a film festival operates. This is certainly true of Sundance, which many, as I will show in the third chapter, have derided as being too industry-focused, too enamoured with celebrity instead of chasing after art for art's sake. What we see in Sundance, however, has long been the case in festivals generally, and understanding this historically is valuable to seeing how the Festival figures into the larger film festival sphere.

After 1968, events began popping up all over the world, a new proliferation of identity-based, community-oriented festivals, as well as more industry-related events marking the larger global film festival field. Both of these, however, reveal a struggle between autonomous and heteronomous practices, with ideology at each type of festival's core. In the former, community festivals, arts and culture become what scholar Skadi Loist calls, "activist tools, where film screenings in community settings were part of general awareness-raising endeavors" (57). Loist, in her article, "The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies, and Circulation," places this period within a larger, historical thread, and counters it against the more professionalized and institutionalized events that gained prominence in the 1980s (de Valck 2007, 20). In Loist's article, she characterizes this phase primarily for its neoliberalism. She writes,

Culture, which used to be a field that was supported with public funds, because it was deemed important for the formation of a coherent national identity, has

increasingly turned into a value-generating creative industry. This ideological shift in the funding landscape directly impacted festivals by introducing a neoliberal corporate business logic into cultural institutions. (58)

Loist goes on to describe this shift in film festivals as moving “from being passive platforms and facilitators for the film industry to becoming intermediaries and increasingly active players in all aspects of the film industry themselves” (59). Dina Iordanova echoes this in her essay, “The Film Festival as an Industry Node,” in which she notes how these developments of the film festival’s role have turned the festival into “a key player in the film industry, as well as society at large” (7). In “First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals,” critic Mark Peranson describes two ways of understanding film festivals: the *business* model, and the *audience* model (25). Peranson’s models mirror Loist’s own portrayal of festivals today—that is, between a business-oriented, neoliberal festival and a smaller, community-oriented festival, like the activist festivals that developed in the second phase. Yet, in comparing the neoliberal form of festival to the smaller, activist kind, it becomes clear that they are simply two opposing sides of an ideological coin. The dual purpose Loist decries in the neoliberal festival is, in many ways, a mirror of both the activist festival and the earlier nation-building event: the film festival has always had dual tendencies, its allegedly autonomous cinephilia paired with the more heteronomous forms of nationalism, activism, and now, a type of passive-aggressive capitalism. Sundance, as we will see, is especially interesting given it is participating in both business *and* audience models, forming a close community of people in the mountains of Utah—albeit, a more industry-focused community, and therefore one that, it should be stated, certainly differs from those of more identity-based festivals and other gatherings that represent often marginalized populations—all the while engaging and influencing the larger film industry. Sundance, therefore, is the embodiment of this dual purpose that we see throughout festival history, a festival that attempts to represent both sides of the conversation.

Loist’s own concern with the contemporary corporatization of festivals is more than valid, grounded as it is in her own values and a focus on ethical practice; however, it is also important to recognize this phenomenon as part of a long history of film festivals that see cinema as a particularly useful tool for political, ideological, social, and economic gains. While one may be preferable to the other for certain people and communities, they are still operating within a Bourdieusian theory of field, which sees artistic practice used for other means, and the



subsequent struggle as wholly necessary. This struggle is further evident in the relationship between European festivals and Hollywood's perhaps more blatant commercialism. As de Valck notes, historically, European festivals have tried to hold Hollywood closely, inviting its stars and filmmakers to events, and gladly welcoming the accompanying "glamour, scandals, and paparazzi" (2007, 24). These festivals have embraced Hollywood, while also presenting themselves as opposed to the "economically-dominated Hollywood agenda" (de Valck 2007, 24). The Sundance Film Festival is perhaps the pinnacle of such a contradiction, and Robert Redford is its human embodiment. In Sundance, we find a battle between visions of independence and those of box office receipts, autonomy and heteronomy. As I will explore in the following chapters, Sundance and Redford take the myth of authenticity and uncivilized wilderness, and then proceed to package it with celebrity actors and directors. This may seem like an attempt for the festival to both have its cake and eat it too: to be considered a home for serious cinephiles who reject commercialism, while also seeking the advantages that come with commercial stardom. However, it is also a means of survival or adaptation within a capitalist, neoliberal structure: as Liz Czach notes, "A film festival without stars and parties would be as impoverished as one without cinephiles" (145). In this view, then, the festival is like a family who gathers around the dinner table at a holiday: the quiet, artistic kid sits on one side of the table, while the loud, boisterous, wealthy cousin is on the other—they seem opposed and yet are inextricably linked, and one cannot come to the table without the other because the wealthy cousin was the artistic kid's ride.

For Bourdieu, this continuous struggle is an expected requirement for the artistic field, as it ultimately fosters growth and facilitates power. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu writes,

it has to be pointed out that objectified cultural capital only exists and subsists in and through the struggles of which the field of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field etc.) ... [is] the site, struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, in other words, their internalized capital. (228)

In order to gain symbolic, or rather, cultural capital, the artistic field must enact this necessary struggle between poles. In looking at film festivals historically, as well as the mentioned case studies, it becomes clear that this autonomous-heteronomous struggle inherent in Bourdieu's artistic field works well as a means of understanding film festivals as a field unto themselves.

The above quotation brings in another Bourdieusian concept worth discussing, however, one that can further aid in understanding the complex web of film festivals and the relevant struggle for power: that is, *capital*.

Specifically, Bourdieu's notion of capital offers a clear way of giving value to that which is not strictly economic gain—though, as I will show, it all still comes back to cash, and this is especially evident in Sundance, which experiences huge growth as it picks up capital from its figurehead Robert Redford. In defining it, however, Robert Moore characterizes Bourdieu's notion of capital as “the ‘energy’ that drives the development of a field through time. Capital in action is the enactment of the principle of the field” (105). Bourdieu, in “The Forms of Capital,” presents *capital* in three forms: *economic capital*, or power that is directly related to monetary gain; *cultural capital*, or that which, while it can be converted into economic capital, is related more to education, as well as cultural practice and legitimacy; and finally, *social capital*, which also can be converted into economic capital, and is more related to class and social standing (16). Bourdieu also describes another, broader form: *symbolic capital*, to which cultural capital belongs. Bourdieu claims symbolic capital is “unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence” (“Forms” 18), and in “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” he similarly describes symbolic capital as “economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a ‘credit’ which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits” (75). Symbolic capital—and therefore, cultural capital—is inextricably tied to economic goals. In dealing in cultural legitimacy, the artistic field accrues symbolic capital which can eventually be converted into economic capital.

In regards to festivals, then, capital is a helpful term for understanding their struggles between art and, as it stands today, commerce. It is also useful in analyzing the steady, continuous exchange of power and influence between festival and filmmaker, as well as between festivals themselves. The world is dotted with thousands upon thousands of festivals—indeed, *spattered* might be a better word, the festival landscape looking continuously like a Jackson Pollock painting, the lines dripping as the blotches of paint connect, blend, and surround one another the way festivals themselves interact, influence, and counter each other. In film festivals, the exchange of capital, both symbolic and economic, is evident in the aforementioned struggle between autonomous and heteronomous values. As the symbolic capital and autonomous

principals are touted and publicly declared, the economic capital begins to pour in, thereby shoring up the heteronomous side of the equation. The Utah/U.S. Film Festival, for example, began its meteoric rise in the festival world when filmmaker and star Robert Redford more publicly attached his name to it, with the festival eventually becoming the Sundance Film Festival. This re-naming and more public relationship, which I will explore in more depth in this thesis's third chapter, carried a massive amount of symbolic capital, and, in turn, brought economic capital as well. Redford endows the kind of prestige that comes from decades of red carpets, filmmaking, awards and festivals. In doing so, the festival itself gained prestige, as well as symbolic and economic capital. This is clearly evident in the growing numbers of both submissions—which, as of 2017, cost between \$65 and \$110 for a feature film submission, and \$40 to \$80 for a short film, episodic, or VR piece, and add up with more and more submissions (“Submit Your Film”)—and those attending. These details, and the growing symbolic capital and connections to Hollywood royalty, bring in further sponsors to bolster the economic capital. The Sundance Kid showed up to save the day, and brought a new weight to the festival, a new identity in the public eye, and bags of symbolic—and real—cash to help boost the festival's appeal.

However, capital does not necessarily speak to how the field itself actually operates, its practices and values, or even necessarily how it attempts to present itself. Yes, Sundance accrues symbolic and economic capital with each success story, but how do we understand that capital? And is that capital affecting the Festival's day-to-day practices? For this type of query, then, Bourdieu follows up with another term: *habitus*. In habitus, we find an extraordinarily useful concept that will offer clarity to the kind of relationship I am exploring: between festival and filmmaker, who is the *habitus* and who is the *field*? In *Distinction*, Bourdieu's weighty analysis of taste formations, the French sociologist describes the habitus as a system of dispositions (6). In the book's second chapter, he elaborates on the concept, understanding the habitus as both a “structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world” (170). In other words, the habitus can be viewed as a collection of dispositions which lead to certain lifestyle choices, beliefs, and values, thereby forming, in many ways, the identity of the field itself, as further determined by the volume of capital said field has accrued. However, each of these concepts—field, capital, habitus—are tied together and all lead

to the formation of certain practices. One cannot function without the other. Indeed, on the relationship between the habitus and the field, Bourdieu writes, “The dispositions constituting the cultivated habitus are only formed, only function and are only valid in a field, in the relationship with a field . . . in which forces are only manifested in their relationship with certain dispositions” (*Distinction* 94). The habitus, then, acts only in combination with both the field and capital, and in doing so, generates identifying practices and structures. I will examine the habitus as it stands in the film festival world later in this chapter, looking at how the *auteur* or *star* becomes a working habitus for the festival itself, something we see embodied in the dynamic between Redford and Sundance.

This kind of relationship, however, as I have mentioned, has not been extensively explored in academia, at least from this perspective. Figures like Marijke de Valck, who looms large in the film festival studies field of research, and others look at it from the opposite direction to my own. While this is counter to my formulation, it is helpful to see how scholars have not only examined this relationship, but also how Bourdieu has been used in film festival studies. As I argue, some of these scholars are somewhat limited in their approach to this dynamic, which I will get to in the coming pages. In order to see these limitations, but also glean valuable methods for my own research, we must engage theories like de Valck’s. In a film festival, she says, a film’s “[s]election for a competition, sidebar, tribute, or retrospective brings cultural recognition to the artifact and its maker, while winning an award bestows the ultimate form of prestige” (“Fostering” 100-1). As such, de Valck views film festivals as spaces for filmmakers to gain symbolic capital (“Fostering” 105). Because of the prestige and honour that film festivals carry, they are able to consecrate certain films and filmmakers as culturally legitimate. She goes on to note that not only are film festivals facilitators of symbolic capital—“gatekeepers in the field of cultural production” (“Fostering” 109), she writes—they are also tastemakers, forming the dispositions and contributing to the practices of a certain subset of people, that is, cinephiles and filmmakers. This, in turn, is connected to the symbolic capital film festivals are continuously imbuing upon filmmakers and auteurs. Echoing Wong, de Valck suggests that, in such an exchange of capital, film festivals produce the tastes of both filmmakers and spectators, not only enabling filmmakers of a certain ilk, but also “the consumers capable of consuming these cultural goods” (“Fostering” 112). In this sense, the festival acts as both a field in which various social agents such as filmmakers are given symbolic capital—that is, prestige, honor, and

recognition—as well as the habitus in which certain sets of values are reproduced amongst the festival participants. The filmmaker is defined by that capital and habitus. As an example of the film festival as habitus, de Valck notes Thai auteur Apichatpong Weerasethakul, who won the Prix Un Certain Regard at Cannes in 2002, before finally being accepted in the festival’s main competition in 2004 (“Fostering” 110). That year saw Weerasethakul win the Jury Prize for his film *Sud pralad*, and, de Valck notes, “the filmmaker has enjoyed a steady favorable reception in the global press since” (“Fostering” 110). Weerasethakul, by winning awards at Cannes, was imbued with symbolic capital, and therefore recognized as culturally legitimate by broader audiences. The festival produced the perception, and Weerasethakul kept returning. He was, at that point, a Cannes filmmaker.

While de Valck’s argument is strong, it does not approach the film festival itself as a social agent that, in turn, similarly takes part in the broader field of film festivals. This is somewhat odd, given de Valck’s own affinity for Bruno Latour’s network theory, which, according to de Valck, rejects “any conceptual distinction between human and non-human actors” (2007, 30). de Valck uses network theory to understand the film festival as a social network made up of various social entities and agents. Network theory, she understands, redirects the attention in cinema studies to the relations between social agents, as well as the agents themselves, thereby removing the hierarchy implied by more national or auteurist approaches (2007, 30). Following the Latourian logic of including non-human actors, the festival itself is a player in the vast network of global art cinema, but also in the connected circuit of film festivals themselves—that is, the field in which film festivals are produced as cultural, symbolic goods with their own laws and economy. While my thesis looks at just one festival, the Sundance Film Festival, I am interested in how a festival gains prominence over another. Furthermore, my thesis, in which a filmmaker gains capital through festivals and awards bodies, before bringing that capital to another festival, is cognizant of the larger festival field that sees such events compete with one another. In having Redford as the public face of Sundance, the Festival is immediately pushed ahead of some other festivals. However, Latourian theory aims to remove the hierarchy, focusing on a “relational interdependence” (De Valck 2007, 34) between social agents, human and non-human, that can remove, or certainly downplay, the hierarchy that might be evident within more auteurist analyses, instead recognizing equally each actor’s role in creating the event.

While it is helpful to include both human and non-human entities, such as festivals, within one's analyses of the network, it is perhaps naïve to look at each social agent's role as equal. For example, in regards to the auteur's role in film festivals, one must recognize, as I do, the heavy weight that festivals and film culture as a whole places on such figures. At the Cannes Film Festival, the recipient of the Palme d'Or, the festival's top prize, is the winning film's director—despite there being a best director prize as well. The same is true of the Berlin Film Festival's top prize, the Golden Bear, as well as Venice's Golden Lion. In "No Start, No End: Auteurism and the auteur theory," film scholar David Andrews calls auteurism "one of art cinema's basic building blocks" (39). He goes on to note how, "Especially at festivals, auteur status is the fuel in the workings, the clearest power source for the entire machinery" (47). While it is helpful to recognize the massive variety of contributors and connections that each play a role in creating a festival, it is equally important to recognize how certain festivals themselves approach cinematic production from a hierarchical standpoint, with the serious *auteur* filmmaker at the top. Hierarchies do exist, between filmmakers themselves, but also between festivals. This is why Bourdieu is more helpful than network theory when approaching something so complex in its simultaneous autonomy and heteronomy as a film festival. While it is useful to understand, as in network theory, the non-human as a social agent just as much as the human, it is also important to recognize the kind of hierarchical forces and even prejudice that are at play between these agents. Studying the Sundance Film Festival and its relationship to Robert Redford, we see how one festival rose in such a hierarchy, both symbolically and economically. As I have already mentioned, and will explore later, Sundance has grown exponentially over the years, in particular as its relationship with Redford has solidified in the public perception. Its own place in the hierarchy and competition between festivals is clear in its relationship to those festivals, in particular those in the United States. Lory Smith, for example, a former Sundance employee and writer of *Party in a Box: The Story of the Sundance Film Festival*, highlights the competition between the Sundance Film Festival and the other big mountain town festival, Colorado's Telluride Film Festival (185). There is a competition and as such, a hierarchy between festivals, and ultimately, one does rise, both symbolically and economically, above others.

de Valck, in her analysis, does not approach the festival as an agent itself which needs to acquire symbolic capital of its own. She focuses primarily on how the festival gives symbolic capital to other agents. Again, de Valck's argument holds together, but in understanding the

power dynamics at festivals, one cannot remove the festival's own motivations and desires. While this thesis does not use network theory as its theoretical foundation, instead focusing on Bourdieu's own social articulation, it is still important to recognize the festival as a player in need of capital to produce itself. How, then, do film festivals set themselves apart? How does Sundance differentiate itself from Telluride, for example? How can film festivals gain prestige, recognition, and honour? As a field in itself, how does one film festival acquire certain practices of its own, which reflect an entirely different set of dispositions, and therefore habitus, than another festival?

This thesis, using the Sundance Film Festival's relationship with filmmaker-star Robert Redford, argues the key to these questions is the auteur figure. Oddly, auteurism and the study of film festivals—events which so clearly traffic in auteurist hierarchy and principles—have not intersected with great depth or frequency, aside from some key texts which I explore in this chapter. Yet, the relationship between auteur and festival, and the impact that the former has on the latter are fundamental to understanding how festivals themselves can operate socially, ideologically, and economically. In order to study this relationship and its Bourdieusian dynamic, we must first encounter and interrogate this auteur figure, along with decades of accompanying scholarly baggage.

### **The Auteur Stays in the Picture**

Within film scholarship, the auteur is an often embattled figure with a long history reaching back to the silent period. The concept—that is, the view of the director as a film's primary author—gained prominence after being posited by Alexandre Astruc in 1948, before finally making its mark in film circles with the critics at *Cahiers du Cinema*, who reformulated this view of film authorship into *la politique des auteurs* (Andrews 38). In the 1960s, American film critic Andrew Sarris brought *la politique* to English-speaking cinephiles, rechristening it the *auteur theory* (Andrews 38). For Sarris, an auteur must be technically savvy when it comes to the nuts and bolts of actually making a film, and must imbue that film with a notable, unique personality (452). While there has been much valid criticism aimed at the auteur theory in the decades since, what I am most interested in at this moment is how auteurism has been used as both a distinguishing and economic factor in the field of cinema.

Aside from a way of hierarchically separating certain films from others, the auteur theory initially acted as a means to distinguish film itself as a medium and art form, as well as spreading its purported virtues across the globe (Andrews 40). The auteur theory was, in this sense, a means of rendering cinema culturally legitimate. From a Bourdieusian standpoint, the auteur theory lent cinema symbolic capital, allowing others to understand cinema in a similar light as other artistic fields in terms of how authorship works, while still highlighting its unique, medium-specific capabilities. It also served a more practical, economic purpose. Timothy Corrigan identifies auteurism with “the desire and demand of an industry to generate an artistic (and specifically Romantic) aura during a period when the industry as such needed to distinguish itself from other, less-elevated forms of mass media (most notably, television)” (102). Since it consecrated cinema as culturally legitimate, auteurism became deeply entrenched in film culture, as well as how the industry operated economically. While trenchant critiques have been useful in expanding the conversation academically beyond the Romantic, solitary figure of the artist, auteurism, David Andrews writes, “is not going anywhere because it is integral to the many cultural and subcultural institutions that emerged amid the post-war explosion of art cinema.” (47). The *auteur* label, whose meaning has perhaps strayed from the more rigorous example laid out by Sarris, carries a certain status with it, elevating directors to a symbolic position that can, in turn, correspond to economic rewards such as distribution deals, grants, and more (Andrews 48).

This aspect of auteurism has further manifested itself in the film industry through marketing. Studios and producers have capitalized on the name recognition of a director in order to draw attention and hopefully boost both symbolic and economic profits for their film. In “The Commerce of Auteurism: Coppola, Kluge, Ruiz,” Corrigan describes the auteurist marketing that bloomed in post-Vietnam war film culture, describing how movie marketing that used a filmmaker’s name “guaranteed a relationship between audience and movie in which an intentional and authorial agency governs, as a kind of brand-name vision that precedes and succeeds the film, the way that movie is seen and received” (102). This marketing technique is still in use in today: when the latest film or television show directed by, for example, American filmmaker and Sundance alum Steven Soderbergh is released, its posters, trailers, and other promotional materials labour over presenting it as a “Soderbergh” work. Soderbergh is present at interview junkets, his face front and center in online featurettes, magazine profiles, and more. His name and face—and their capital—are being used to sell the film. Corrigan insightfully



characterizes this figure, then, as an *auteur*-star—that is, an *auteur* figure that is treated in a similar manner, and produces the same effect, as a star. Certainly, an *auteur* figure brings prestige to a project, but also, “the *auteur*-star is meaningful primarily as a promotion or recovery of a movie or group of movies, frequently regardless of the filmic text itself” (105). The *auteur* figure, then, has become a marketing tool, known both for the cultural goods she produces, but also for the distinguishable—that is, marketable—personality. While the *auteur*-star is certainly entrenched in the economic fabric of the film industry as a whole, he is especially vibrant and fawned over in cinephiliac circles, in which, much like *auteurism* from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, there is a desire for cinema to be more than a commercial machine, but rather a culturally legitimate art form. As such, the *auteur*-star’s clearest home is the film festival, where films and filmmakers are regularly deemed culturally legitimate, and the allegedly autonomous figure of the *auteur* attempts to gain prominence over the fickle, heteronomous fame of the celebrity.

This imaginary battle between *auteur* and celebrity for autonomy in cinematic art finds its primary site in the festival. In “Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals,” Liz Czach explores the film festival as a site of struggle between cinephilia and Hollywood commercialism. For cinephiles, the latter phenomenon is exemplified by the abundant presence of stars. Czach describes the deep-seated cinephiliac fear that Hollywood’s worship of Mammon has permanently infiltrated the hallowed halls of the film festival. “The assumption,” she writes, “is that where stardom is celebrated, the importance of film wanes” (141). Czach relays a story, then, of how certain cinephiles have attempted to combat this supposed invasion of stars and celebrity. At the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, buttons were given out that were “emblazoned with the slogan ‘Focus on Film.’ ... As the accompanying material pointed out, displaying the button spoke the following of its wearer: ‘... My idea of ‘celebrity’ is the filmmaker who directed my favorite film at the Festival’” (142). At film festivals, especially those purporting to support certain cinephiliac, autonomous values, stardom is shifted to the figure of the filmmaker—that is, the *auteur*. In this view, which parallels Corrigan’s argument, the film festival becomes a site in which the *auteur* figure, perhaps ironically, can be understood as a type of celebrity or star. Wong, in her book, echoes this, stating more explicitly, “auteurs themselves are undisputed

‘stars’ of film festivals” (8).<sup>3</sup> In studying the relationship between the auteur and the film festival, then, it becomes necessary to approach the auteur figure from a star studies vantage point, in both symbolic and economic terms.

### **Stars, Images, and Brands**

In Richard Dyer’s landmark star studies text, *Stars*, the British scholar lays out a clear theoretical framework and methodological approach to the study of stars and stardom. Dyer begins from a production and economic standpoint, noting how stars in Hollywood are primarily viewed in terms of *capital*, *investment* (a guarantee against loss of profit), *outlay*, and *market* (that is, to sell films in the competitive cinematic market) (11). However, while Dyer acknowledges that production and consumption are “determining forces in the creation of stars” (22), he is primarily interested in the ideology at work in stardom—or rather, how certain dominant ideologies might be reinforced in the production and representation of stars—and as such, he spends a great deal of time in the book exploring the star as image, in which “some meanings and affects are foregrounded and others are masked or displaced” (3). The star image, Dyer writes, is “a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs. This configuration may constitute the general image of stardom... or of a particular star ... It is manifest not only in films but in all kinds of media texts” (38). Dyer lumps these media texts in groups: *promotion*, *publicity*, *films* and *commentaries/criticism* (68). Stitched together across these forms is a complex and dynamic image. “The image,” Dyer writes, “is a *complex totality* and it does have a *chronological dimension*. What we need [in order] to understand that totality in its temporality is the *structured polysemy*” (72)—that is, a collection of varying meanings that can both support and reinforce one another, or act in opposition to one another.

Dyer’s study of stars as images to be dissected offers a key way of interrogating the auteur filmmaker’s relationship to the film festival. Specifically, how do the two entities—the filmmaker and the festival—speak of themselves? How do others speak of them, and what does this contribute to their respective images? As I will examine in this thesis’s second chapter, Redford’s biography, as well as his films and the journalism that surrounds him as both director

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<sup>3</sup> In choosing Robert Redford as my case study, he works particularly well as the figure who bridges the two divided sides. As both celebrated auteur *and* celebrity actor, Redford inherently fulfills both the perceived autonomous and heteronomous sides.

and performer become fundamental to understanding the mythic, American image that he is publicly constructing for himself. This, in turn, plays into how the Sundance Film Festival is perceived, understood, and constructed.

Paul McDonald echoes many of Dyer's thoughts. In *Hollywood Stardom*, McDonald emphasizes the star image as "the best means for analyzing the symbolic contents of stardom and to conceptualize the forms in which star identities are circulated in cultural markets" (6). McDonald dives further into the practical side of stardom, however, and how this image has an economic effect, in addition to Dyer's ideological one. McDonald believes an economic inquiry is a requirement of any star study, given that Hollywood itself largely defines stardom in such commercial terms (39). He writes, "the star is a person-as-brand, a symbolic vehicle used to create a set of impressions deployed in selling a particular film experience" (41). The star image, as formed in relevant media texts, acts as a means of altering the consumer's perception of the film product. Looking at McDonald's star-as-brand model, certain parallels between this system and Bourdieu's own social analysis become clear. McDonald points to this in his own study, specifically in a later chapter of his book in which he explores prestigious actors and awards, and how performance, in its materiality, might enact symbolic capital (223). However, he does not point to the star's ability to act as a habitus for the film itself. The star embodies values and meanings and brings those to bear on the film. In this sense, the star imbues a film with his or her symbolic and economic capital, offering a means of understanding that product through the star's own unique (but not too unique) lens.

Not only, then, is the star giving capital to the film, as McDonald attests, but I argue she is also acting, in a certain fashion, as a habitus for the film, informing the film's content and therefore the values, norms, ideologies, and practices it portrays and produces. The star, as habitus, is a system of dispositions which, via its own unique cultural capital, lends structure to the film—that is, it offers a way of understanding the film through a framework of certain values and meanings—but it also contains a structure of its own via relevant media texts. Furthermore, just as the relationship between field and habitus is dynamic, with each affecting the other, the star is equally affected by the film itself, since it too is a media text which informs the star's image. In examining this dynamic, with the star as a habitus informing the norms, values, and practices of a film and its perception, we can begin to see parallels to the relationship between

auteur-stars and film festivals, and how the former, in certain cases, influences and affects how the latter is perceived.

### **The Special Relationship: Branding Film Festivals with Auteur Capital**

At film festivals, stars are not the only ones photographed on red carpets. Indeed, at the Sundance Film Festival, standing before a bright wall adorned with the logos of Sundance and a few of its bigger corporate sponsors—that Bourdieusian battle between the autonomous and the heteronomous on full display—the filmmakers themselves are often seen beside the actors, happily posing in their lumpy parkas and limply hanging, seemingly superfluous scarves. These filmmakers, particularly those who have already been deemed *auteurs* by the larger film culture, are the true stars of film festivals—especially festivals that attempt to appear autonomous in the production of themselves. As such, the dynamic between auteur and festival ought to be understood in a similar way as that between star and film. If the star acts as the habitus to the film’s own field, casting the film in its own light, then, running parallel, the auteur-star can act as habitus to a film festival, offering her own unique capital—that is, *auteur capital*—to the festival’s field, and thereby skewing the perception of said festival through a lens of the auteur’s own dispositions and prestige. In this relationship, the practices borne out at the festival are directly informed and produced by the auteur’s own image or persona. The question, then, becomes what requirements are there for the auteur to effectively carry out this role?

In *Stars*, Dyer draws parallels between stars and novelistic characters, listing several attributes of the latter such as particularity and interest, autonomy, roundness, development, interiority, motivation, discrete identity, and consistency (104). A novel’s characters must be unique and with “a life of their own” (105). Much like the star’s polysemy of texts and traits, characters must have “a multiplicity that fuses into a complex whole” (105), with motivated action, a clear identity, and a coherence or sense as to how they act in the world of the novel (105-7). For Dyer, this is similar to the star image, itself a constructed self built over time. In adopting these novelistic character traits, the star image is well-positioned for spectators to recognize and identify with, and therefore allow for the reinforcement of norms. Dyer writes, “By feeling that we are identifying with a unique person, we ignore the fact that we are identifying with a normative figure. It needs only to be added that ideology works better when we cannot see it working” (109). Later, in the second chapter, we will see this in action in the

biography of Robert Redford, which shades in the star's many opposing traits that form a satisfying whole. Similarly, the auteur, in their own stardom, must be both *recognizable* and *identifiable*. The film-goer must associate the auteur with certain autonomous principles that can then be transferred or projected—as auteur capital—onto the festival. This is generously accommodated, following de Valck's argument, by the larger field of festivals. By already being imbued with symbolic capital at another, likely European, festival, or with awards from other prestigious institutions and awards bodies, the auteur-star gains the necessary recognition, as well as the possibility for spectator identification. This distinguished status and cultural legitimacy is furthermore embodied by the special accommodations given auteur filmmakers at festivals, with organizers labouring over flying these special guests in, placing them at equally prestigious hotels, and organizing tributes and galas around their name. As I have already mentioned, Redford was first connected to the Sundance Film Festival in 1978, its inaugural year, as chairman to the board of what was then known as the U.S. Film Festival. He was, as such, honoured in that role. However, while Redford would glancingly participate in the Festival itself, he was mostly being used for his name, a tool for capital. Lory Smith even recalls using Redford's name to draw in the interest and ensure the participation of filmmakers (8-9). The Festival communicates the auteur-star's unique capital to both audience and the larger festival field, and, as such, retains the cultural legitimacy of the filmmaker's artistic autonomy.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of this relationship through time. This is, once again, in keeping with Dyer's own approach to star studies, but here, in balancing the auteur-star's relationship to the festival, we must, as Dyer did, recognize the temporality of this relationship. I argue that in order for the auteur to successfully act as habitus to the festival, and therefore fully inform that festival's identity and practices in the public eye, time is required. This is in keeping with a Bourdieusian understanding. Karl Maton, describing the relationship between habitus and field, writes, "Crucially, they are also both evolving, so relations between habitus and field are ongoing, dynamic and partial: they do not match perfectly, for each has its own internal logic and history" (57). While auteur figures can make their mark on any festival, temporarily bringing it prestige and recognition, if the relationship is not prolonged, then said auteur's influence upon the festival's practices will be limited. If a festival continues to receive a steady stream of different prestigious auteurs, then the festival will certainly gain the associated cultural legitimacy, but the relationship will not be the same. The festival's practices, identity,

and public perception will not be framed by any singular auteur's persona, and this is what I am most interested in and is what further distinguishes my own inquiry from other scholars such as de Valck and Wong. If a festival brings in a group of filmmakers with recurring styles, practices, and authorial personalities, it is a relationship akin to those studies by de Valck, in which the festival acts as a habitus to the filmmakers, producing and reproducing film styles in its own image. What I am interested in is the reverse of this, how a filmmaker can have equal influence over a festival, particularly, in a developing festival. For this habitus-field relationship one needs time—what Dyer, in his approach to stardom, calls the “chronological dimension” (1979, 72). In order, then, for the singular auteur-star to have any lasting effect or impression on the practices and identity of a singular film festival, the former must have a clear, ongoing relationship with the latter. In such a long-lasting relationship, the auteur can, consciously or otherwise, successfully brand the festival with his image, acting as habitus to the festival. In understanding such a relationship, then, it is essential to study both auteur and festival, as well as the various media texts that contribute to their images.

As I noted in the introduction, this thesis builds its argument around the relationship between Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival, which I consider the pinnacle of such a dynamic. In order to understand Sundance and the kind of capital and norms it traffics in, we must first understand its habitus, which I argue is the image of Robert Redford. The following chapter, therefore, dives into this picture. How is this persona constructed? With which themes and archetypes is this identity playing? How has Redford's image been constructed, whether through official voices or otherwise? This analysis will, in turn, provide a concrete foundation through which we can understand the relationship and power dynamics between Redford and Sundance, illuminating how the former brings his auteur capital to the latter, and a cinephiliac, American authenticity is rendered for all its Festival patrons.

## **Chapter 2: The Authentic Myth of Ordinary Bob**

In the spring of 1972, Robert Redford, Hollywood's golden-headed Apollo, arrived in Cannes to support the premiere of *Jeremiah Johnson*, a feature film directed by his then-close friend Sydney Pollack. In one photo, Redford can be seen standing beside Pollack and others, his flaxen hair perfectly swept across his forehead, his shirt propped open to reveal a necklace with a turquoise bobble dangling over his tan, sparsely-haired chest (*L'acteur américain...*). In another photo, he has on a pair of sunglasses, and, with his head cocked slightly to the side, he looks entirely the part of a cool, glamorous, movie-star god, momentarily dropping in on the Croisette from the Hollywood heavens (*Jeremiah Johnson Party*). Redford was already a star, already deeply involved in the production of films such as *Johnson*, but at Cannes, he gained a bit more credibility, imbued as an artist with that Cannes capital. Here, we find an auteur at the festival. In Pollack's film, Redford has a decidedly different look. Indeed, for half the film, Redford, as the titular Johnson, has a grizzled ginger beard covering his face. His tan in the film does not seem overly glamorous—it could just as easily be a burn, a tough result of living in the woods and surviving under the hot sun and high altitude of the Colorado mountains. He is rough-hewn and tortured, overtly macho and strong. I will explore *Jeremiah Johnson* in more detail later in this chapter, but the film and its festival premiere act as a solid introduction to the contradictions at the core of Redford's complex star image, and later, his directorial persona. Redford is, as I will show, a many-faced god: he is simultaneously commercial and independent, patriarch and egalitarian, old-fashioned American and high-flying member of the global village. Redford is the sum total of these seemingly contradictory stances, if not the void in between. He is simultaneously movie star, director, and mega-producer Robert Redford, and a seemingly regular guy that, in the 1980s, came to be known in his Hollywood film community as "Ordinary Bob" (Biskind 12). This dialectical tension is at the centre of Redford's public persona, and, as I will show in my third chapter, it is a key entry point to understanding the Sundance Film Festival, to which Redford is so firmly, publicly attached. By studying Redford, we begin to see the heteronomous-autonomous crossroads that give Sundance its identity, as well as its credibility and reputation.

This chapter examines Robert Redford and the persona that has been constructed around him throughout his long career. In order to see the image that is made available to the larger

public, I will primarily approach Redford through materials easily reachable for and disseminated among the public. As such, I will begin by breaking down the image constructed in his biography, before then trying to understand what his films as both actor and director say about the auteur-star. What kind of auteur capital is being raised in his career? How does one summarize the authorial persona and star image of Robert Redford, which, in keeping with Dyer, is so replete with contradictions and oppositional forces? Before I analyze Redford, however, I will begin by looking at the interconnected concepts of authenticity, confession, and masculinity as they pertain to American identity. This will, in turn, give a good foundation for investigating Redford's own persona, and, in turn, Sundance.

### **A History of the Rise of Authenticity**

In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, critic Lionel Trilling gives an expansive history of its titular concepts, examining how the early mode of *sincerity* eventually gave way to, or rather morphed into *authenticity*. The latter term is, as I will show, imperative to both the Redford-habitus and the Sundance Film Festival-field, and so Trilling's historical approach is helpful for seeing how authenticity is eventually mined as both commodity and identity trait by both entities. According to Trilling, sincerity became especially important to various European cultures during the sixteenth century, developing in time with the rapid shift in how communities were organized (26). With the rise of sincerity, the notion of authenticity, or living authentically, became of paramount importance. From Trilling's perspective, this mode of authenticity is tied to museum origins, in which historical and artistic objects are tested to be sure they "are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them—or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given" (93). Already, then, authenticity can be seen, in Trilling's analysis, as reaching for those parallel poles or principles that Bourdieu is so preoccupied with—that is, the heteronomous and autonomous, the cultural and economic.

Art was viewed as authentic, according to Trilling, in its capability for self-definition. The art of the nineteenth century, he writes, "is understood to exist wholly by the laws of its own being, which include the right to embody painful, ignoble, or socially unacceptable subject-matters" (99-100). Trilling situates this artistic-historical analysis within a larger conversation about the nineteenth century's approach to beauty and the sublime, though he focuses his discussion of art on the literary kind. For example, he makes brief reference to Shakespeare's



*Hamlet* (93), and devotes plenty of time to Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in addition to literary characters such as Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote, Leopold Bloom of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. He furthermore goes on to examine the work of Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, Jean-Paul Sartre, Fyodor Dostoevsky, William Blake, Gustave Flaubert, George Eliot, and many other prominent writers, including, as I will soon explore, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. While Trilling is not directly speaking of cinema, his approach to art as an ideally autonomous practice is especially applicable for how, as I will show, Redford presents himself as an artist, and how Sundance, by extension, presents itself as a haven for the autonomous, authentic artist.

*Artistic* authenticity, in Trilling's account, becomes something to aspire to in one's *personal* authenticity. This, in turn, resonates with Bourdieu once again. Trilling does not draw these economic or Bourdieusian connections, but in my view, his historical account does point to how artists and art have, for centuries, affected one another's identities—in particular, one's mode of authenticity. As art becomes both admired and exchanged, and, as such, increasingly wrapped up in these cultural-economic considerations, so too the artist—and the relationship—becomes entangled in both sides, creative and commercial, of the conversation. As art affects one's personal authenticity, then the authenticity of the artist will have an impact on the perceived authenticity of the art. This returns us to Bourdieu's habitus and field, with each informing the other in a steady stream of cultural and economic exchanges. Authenticity, then, is engaged in this battle between autonomy and heteronomy, in particular for how one's perceived autonomy has more bearing on the cultural capital than the actual autonomy—one's authenticity matters most in how it is perceived. We find our authenticity—our pure, real self—both lives and dies, oddly, by the judgments of others.

This comes to fruition in Trilling's historical analysis when he reaches Rousseau, for whom what ruins authenticity is society (93). In Rousseau, furthermore, we begin to see how authenticity becomes inextricably linked to the purifying notion of confession. In *Culture and Authenticity*, Charles Lindholm recognizes Rousseau's impact on the confessional aspects of modern authenticity as well, calling Rousseau's own published *Confessions* (1782), “the harbinger of a new ideal in which exploring and revealing one's essential nature was taken as an absolute good, even if this meant flying in the face of the moral standards of society” (8). One's authentic self is, according to Rousseau, naturally counter-cultural, and imperative to the

flourishing of this authenticity is the notion of freely sharing one's deepest feelings, to be held in equal regard as the next person's innermost thoughts. This sense of egalitarianism and other aspects of Rousseau's thought were deeply influential for French revolutionaries at the end of the 18th century (Lindholm 2008, 9), acting, perhaps ironically, as the foundation on which modernity would be built.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as this kind of confessional, expressive, personal authenticity becomes more enmeshed in European cultures, we see the parallel rise of capitalism, nationalism, and other aspects of modern life (Lindholm 2013, 390). Authenticity, then, becomes ensnared in discussions and elements of power. In viewing authenticity as a confessional mode, it is helpful to look to French philosopher Michel Foucault's own historical analysis of confession as an exchange of power. This, in turn, will become applicable to Redford's own mode of confessional cinema, which becomes further propagated and reproduced through Sundance's own brand of cinema.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes how literature—again, like Trilling, we are operating within the realm of literary art, but which can be easily translated over to the Redfordian cinema I will discuss later—in the modern era adopted more confessional traits, moving from a purely narrative mode, “to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage” (59). Truth, Foucault recognizes, or rather, confessed truth, has an enticing nature. The vision of someone divulging their most intimate secrets can be powerfully compelling within that construct, and as a result of the flourishing of the confessional mode in modern culture, Foucault notes, we barely notice the manipulative aspects of culture asking us to confess. Foucault writes,

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<sup>4</sup> This is ironic largely because authenticity is also often cited, as I briefly mention earlier in this chapter, as a direct result of, or rather antidote to, the complexities that modern life offers. According to Charles Lindholm, for example, “They had begun the irreversible plunge into modernity, which can be succinctly defined as the condition of living among strangers. In this desacralized, and unpredictable environment it became possible to break out of prescribed roles and pursue secular dreams of wealth, power, and fame. But the pleasures and possibilities of social mobility coincided with feelings of alienation and meaninglessness, as well as a greater potential for guile and deceit” (2008, 3). It is in this culture of alleged alienation that sincerity and, subsequently, authenticity become such desired traits.

The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom. (60)

Here, we see the contradictions at the heart of not only confession, but also its accompanying vision of authenticity. Much as Bourdieu’s artistic field is a bundle of contradictions that aid in reinforcing the dominant ideology, so too confession and authenticity act as both tools of perceived liberation and power. This will be enormously important to Redford and, subsequently, Sundance, for whom this sort of confessional authenticity is paramount. Much as in Foucault’s analysis, Redford’s desire for confession becomes both a way for him to demonstrate and disseminate his purported authenticity and therefore his autonomy as an artist. Later in this chapter, we will see this in particular in his directorial debut *Ordinary People*, and this confessional-power dynamic, in turn, becomes a predominant mode for the independent, commercial cinema that Sundance traffics.

### **Authenticity, Masculinity and the American West**

Authenticity, then, according to Trilling and Lindholm, is a state of being in which one is as he says he is. This is tied to confession and the expression of one’s self, and, as we have additionally seen in Foucault, is directly implicated in economic and cultural considerations of power. This all corresponds to Bourdieu’s conception of the artistic field and its own competing characteristics, as well as its engagement in power and hierarchy. How, in the face of modernity, can I retain my authenticity? What does it mean to do so? Returning to Rousseau, this is tied to the question of origin—that is, the original authentic state of human being (Lindholm 2008, 9). According to Lindholm, this resulted in a “nostalgia for the primitive ‘noble savage’” (2008, 9) which would go on to influence the rise of nationalism. This thread is especially important in discussing authenticity in the United States, where escaping the urban world was inherent to the wilderness of 19th century frontier life. In analyzing authenticity as it appears in America then—

something integral to understanding Redford and Sundance's own brand of uniquely American confessional authenticity—it is first important to look at how the concept of wilderness informed American identity, and therefore its concept of authenticity. After all, where better to return to the “original authentic character of humanity” (Lindholm 2008, 9), that mythic state of purity, than the untamed wilderness of the American West?

According to historian and environmental studies scholar Roderick Nash, the idea of an unchecked wilderness is fundamental to the national identity of the United States. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Nash connects the desire for wilderness as far back as the Romantic era. Nash writes, “in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wild country lost much of its repulsiveness. It was not that wilderness was any less solitary, mysterious, and chaotic, but rather in the new intellectual context these qualities were coveted” (44). This shift, Nash posits, was connected with the conception of the *sublime*, which allowed for chaos and the unkempt in beauty (45). This Romantic vision of the wild was, according to Nash, not particularly popular amongst trappers, farmers, and explorers; however, it soon came to be the prevailing mode amongst many American explorers, beginning with Daniel Boone (63). In the 19th century, America was still in the process of its discovery, and it was in this aspect—its wilderness—that America was able to set itself apart (67). The American wilderness could not be matched by anything in Europe. This realization, as well as the Romantic view of the aesthetic value of wilderness, came along as authenticity was developing in Europe and the United States. Nash ties this together as he writes, “if, as many suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works” (69). Wilderness, in this view, was closer to some original divine ideal, that shimmering image of authenticity that humanity loses in the face of modernity at which Rousseau too gestured. It is in the search for that authenticity, that wilderness, then, that the European Romantic vision finds its American equivalent: enter, Henry David Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist writer, and part-time cabin and pond enthusiast.

For Thoreau, “the patron saint of American environmental writing” (Buell 115), the surge of technological innovation came at the cost of older, traditional ways life (Nash 86). As

America became swallowed by its developing capitalism<sup>5</sup>, Thoreau turned to his country's wilderness and an alternative way of life to the booming cities that were sprouting up all around him. As ecocritic Lawrence Buell describes in his book, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Thoreau's basic philosophy boiled down to some key ingredients: "[r]educed material wants, rustic habitation, self-sufficiency at every level, [and] the cultivation of self-improvement through a disciplined life led largely in solitude" (145). As Buell sees it, Thoreau then sets the tone for how American literature, and the culture-at-large, began to engage with wilderness. It should be noted, however, that Thoreau did not do this in a vacuum, nor did he do it without precedence. In addition to the European Romantics, American figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman abounded, trafficking in the same wilderness-as-authenticity imagery that Thoreau would later indulge in. In Emerson's key essay, "Self-Reliance," the American transcendentalist writer evangelizes for one's autonomy in life, writing, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself" (59). In the same essay, Emerson expounds upon this potential autonomy and its relation to the natural world, writing, "The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried" (10). For Emerson, as with Thoreau, a man—for his language is very much gendered towards the masculine—must venture out into the woods, away from society—which, he says, "everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members" (14)—in order to find his true, authentic, autonomous self. The essay, which was published 14 years before the release of Thoreau's *Walden*, proposes an escape from the city, which emasculates men, and a foray into the wild, which reinforces their masculine autonomy. Here, the strand continues, to be reinforced again and again, from Thoreau, to, as I will show, Theodore Roosevelt and others, including a blond-headed filmmaker-star named Robert Redford.

Nature, as has been argued, is fundamental to the larger American national identity—the country's wilderness was what set it apart from its colonial European cousins. As a result, according to Buell, "American literature has been considered preoccupied with country and

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<sup>5</sup> For Thoreau, this was exemplified by his inability to find a blank notebook. As recounted by Nash, "the only [notebooks] the merchants in Concord offered were ledges ruled for dollars and cents. At the Harvard commencement of 1837 [Thoreau] spoke about 'the commercial spirit' as a virus infecting his age" (87).

wilderness as setting, theme, and value in contradistinction to society and the urban, notwithstanding the sociological facts of urbanization and industrialization” (33). This is the case with Thoreau, certainly, but also the writers before him. It was furthermore evident in those writers that followed, in particular as America expanded ever west.

As the United States began to swallow up territory to the west of its original colonies, there was a certain appeal in the alleged adventure of it all. As Henry G. Bugbee writes in his essay, “Wilderness in America,” the draw was “to setting out anew, to a break with conventions in which life might have been constrained if not falsified, to exploration and discovery rich in promise of new beginnings and firmer foundations, to a testing of mettle in which a man might find himself and inherit a dignity proper to him” (614). Bugbee’s writing carries all the Romantic, almost mystical attachments that the wilderness would have had for many Americans in the mid-19th century. Wilderness, discovery, foundation—this was where an American could find his authentic self, away from the hustle and bustle of modern life. A few decades later, when American expansionism had seemingly reached its peak, a fear spread across the nation—in particular, the Eastern states—that this mythic frontier was closing. Where would the opportunities for authenticity be then? Exeunt, Thoreau, Emerson, and others; enter Theodore Roosevelt, Frederic Remington, and Owen Wister, all of whom would prove influential for the kind of masculine, Romantic wilderness fantasy that Redford and Sundance would participate in.

In Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister, the American masculine ego found its new figureheads. According to Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher’s *The American West: A New Interpretive History*, these men dressed American masculinity with a rough exterior. Hine and Faragher cite historian G. Edward White’s argument that each of these men believed firmly that “only by coming to grips with the experience of westering—with the myth of the frontier—could America preserve important aspects of their culture being swept away by the rush of industrialization” (495). Roosevelt headed west after the deaths of his wife, as well as his mother in 1884, and, according to Hine and Faragher, saw his frontier journey as an important step in the development of his outsized masculinity, eventually learning to kill deer and track mountain lions (495). Remington and Wister were much the same, unhappy around women or the apparently feminizing presence of the city (497-8). Here, again, we see the importance of authenticity in American masculine mythmaking. Michael L. Johnson echoes this in his book, *Hunger for the Wild: America’s Obsession with the Untamed West*, in which he characterizes the

concern over the closing of the frontier as a complex issue, filled with “doubts about the nation’s democratic spirit and masculinity, misgivings about the future of industrial civilization—but most strongly that nostalgia for a return to nature. And nature meant, eminently the West, a place now conquered, much of its wildness lost and gone forever” (204). It is in this state of masculine anxiety that many of the myths of the westering man—as exemplified and distributed by Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister—are formed and begin to flourish. As a result, American authenticity gets tied up with not only wilderness and discovery, but also a specific strain of masculinity. This is the kind of hyper-masculine, authentic figure that Redford romantically portrays in *Jeremiah Johnson*. But as I have noted, this image of the knife-toting, pelt-wearing, Indigenous-people-killing man is built on the declarative power of myth, formed in the annals of dime-store novels and John Ford Westerns.<sup>6</sup> In all these stories and films, the most dominant theme that arises, according to Hine and Faragher, is an “obsessive attention to hardshell masculinity” (506). This kind of attention extends beyond the westering figure, however, and certainly includes Thoreau, whose venture out into the cabin at Walden Pond could be seen as removing oneself from the allegedly feminizing forces of the city. As Buell writes, in considering Leslie Fielder’s own assessment of early American fiction, “[W]ilderness in American writing serves as a liminal site for male self-fulfillment in recoil from adult responsibility associated with female-dominated culture in the settlements” (33). Thoreau, as well as Roosevelt, Remington, Wister, and other like men, see the city as ultimately feminine, and therefore fundamentally flawed when it comes to the flourishing of one’s masculinity. As I will show, this becomes especially relevant to Redford in his 1998 film, *The Horse Whisperer*, which sees a woman come from the city to the majestic fields of Montana to be shown her true self and purified in the masculine wilderness.

However, I would like to reinforce that this vision of the westering male, or the Thoreauvian who recedes into the woods is more complicated in its truth than in its myth.

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<sup>6</sup> Hine and Faragher draw an explicit connection between films such as John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939) and the Western romantic vision of westering. They write, “Indeed, taking the cues provided by Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister, western movies became a primary source for twentieth-century images of American manhood” (506). This would, in turn, encourage these myths of the American west to take hold, and further reinforce the image of a masculine wild west.

Imperative to Thoreau's whole system of thought, for example, was that life was not to be a strict abandonment of the city, but rather a combination of both the wild world and those finer, modern things in life (Nash 92). Thoreau, then, brought culture to bear on wilderness, and American authenticity's next steps became, instead of either revering strictly one or the other, about keeping one's foot in both worlds, blending each world in equal measure. This is perhaps best exemplified by Thoreau's own experience with the cabin on Walden Pond. As Kathryn Schulz describes in an article in *The New Yorker*,

In reality, Walden Pond in 1845 was scarcely more off the grid, relative to contemporaneous society, than Prospect Park is today. The commuter train to Boston ran along its southwest side; in summer the place swarmed with picnickers and swimmers, while in winter it was frequented by ice cutters and skaters. Thoreau could stroll from his cabin to his family home, in Concord, in twenty minutes, about as long as it takes to walk the fifteen blocks from Carnegie Hall to Grand Central Terminal. He made that walk several times a week, lured by his mother's cookies or the chance to dine with friends.

This, as Schulz later notes, is glossed over in Thoreau's *Walden*, and so here, once again, we see the Bourdieusian desire to remain autonomous—or rather, authentic—in the public perception, while still having access to the heteronomous aspects of life, those economic privileges that come from the colonialist perspective. For Thoreau, his authenticity and autonomy as a male writer in mid-19th century America involved venturing out into the woodlands “to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau 100-101). As we see, however, this is only half the truth, and even Thoreau knew that the ascetic vision of the American male was not based in reality, necessarily. However, as the myth of the westering adventurer took hold in the American consciousness, its connection between a hard-won masculinity and a uniquely American authenticity became solidified, which, in turn, reinforced the view of a patriarchal wilderness, and abandoned women's points of view to the dusty shelves of history.

While the masculine westerer became prevalent in the cultural consciousness, women were reportedly leaving the countryside in droves. Hine and Faragher note multiple accounts which suggest “young women were pushed out of the countryside by constricted opportunities



and the lingering legacy of patriarchy” (418). These views are glossed over in the dominant Western myth, which favours masculine figures who abandon perceived feminizing forces to those feminine figures who flee male violence and other strongholds of the patriarchy (Hine & Faragher 419). This is not to say that there were no feminine voices in mid-19th century America. Lawrence Buell cites authors such as Susan Cooper, Elizabeth Wright, and Mary Austin who play in the same Thoreauvian playground. Buell writes, “Altogether, it seems that pre-modern women’s pastoral was, like its Thoreauvian counterpart, capable of questioning the normative values that seemingly regulated it, and of exploring the claims of self-realization against those of social constraint” (49). However, Buell does not recognize that these authors do not have, to borrow Bourdieu’s terms, remotely the same capital as their male counterparts, Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Roosevelt, Wister, and others. Furthermore, these women were still writing within the patriarchal system that reinforced the dominant ideology of the westering male. This is to say that, while there were women who wrote about nature and wilderness at the time of Thoreau et al., the writing was still contained within the masculine fantasy of wilderness authenticity. This could, then, contribute not to the perceived freedoms of women in wilderness, but rather the realities of women being subjected to a male fantasy of pelts, rifles, and hunting. In addition, the dominant portrayal of women in the masculine writing was altogether negative, a force to be reckoned with and overcome.

For the purposes of my own project, this portrayal of women, and their relationship to a patriarchal West, becomes especially relevant to the career of Redford in his films, *A River Runs Through It* and *The Horse Whisperer*, as I will show. However, what is more critical is how the image of Redford, as the habitus to Sundance, reinforces these gender roles and patriarchy in the Festival itself. How does this strand of 19th century patriarchy manifest itself in the programming and broader image of the Festival? Sundance, as with Redford, carries an image of supporting women filmmakers, and even has an Initiative to implement this vision; however, as I will explore in this thesis’s third chapter, this is a stagnant movement. Marches may occur, but actual, continuous progress stalls at the moment of announcement.

### **Commodifying an Authentic Wilderness**

As my research has attested, though, this duality began with neither Sundance, nor Redford. Rather, it reflects the morass of masculinity, autonomy, and wilderness that flourished in the

19th century and on. American authenticity, in time, became entrenched in a specific vision of masculinity, one that reinforced patriarchal ideals, as well as a vision of the self-defining wildman who separates himself from the emasculating forces of the urban centre and ventures into the pure, real, authentic wild to flourish in his male autonomy. Once again, this mythic vision of the masculine west works well with Bourdieu's own system of the autonomous and heteronomous field.<sup>7</sup> There is a perceived autonomy—the authenticity of a man in the pure wild—and there is an underlying heteronomous state—Thoreau's proximity to Concord and desire for fine things like laundry, cookies, and economic stability. While Bourdieu is discussing artistic fields, the same principles apply to discussions of authenticity in America. Authenticity, then, has long been a marketable commodity in the United States, and in particular in Western image-making.

In "Authoring Authenticity," cultural studies scholar Curtis Hinsley Jr. argues that these images of authenticity were developed within a market context—or rather, in Bourdieu's terms, the autonomy was forged within heteronomous principles. Hinsley Jr. writes:

A century ago, the initial claiming and naming of this region by expansive Anglo forces of commerce and politics involved a persistent deployment of power, but the imaginative

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<sup>7</sup> In *Distinction*, Bourdieu even briefly analyzes masculinity, though in regards to eating. Bourdieu discusses working class men who consider fish an inappropriate food for a man, since it does not fill the male stomach (190). Even more so, however, these men find it inappropriate "because fish has to be eaten in a way which totally contradicts the masculine way of eating, that is, with restraint, in small mouthfuls, chewed gently... The whole masculine identity—what is called virility—is involved in these two ways of eating, nibbling and picking, as befits a woman, or with whole-hearted male gulps and mouthfuls" (190-1). It is interesting to consider this in relation to the historical vision of the American male, to avoid the gentility of perceived femininity, and venture off to the rough-hewn paths of the wild. Here, Bourdieu is examining how taste in food is related to how each economic class relates to the body. Seen in this light, then, 19th century American ideology seems to be functioning in similar ways, viewing the male body as brutal and strong, and therefore enabling this vision of the westering man, rough-hewn and living in bark shanties, as befits his tough, masculine body. But, as Bourdieu might note, this is not a universal—it is very much entrenched in the social fields of the time, as they dealt with encroaching modernity and the shifting scales of power.

construction was as much aesthetic as economic or political. This aesthetic claim staking ... reflected in turn a widespread appetite in post-Civil War American society for various forms of authentic experience: authentic aesthetic/religious sensibilities, relations to landscape, modes of production, sexual identities, and social relationships. (462)

Soon, market forces worked to commodify this appetite for authenticity, feeding it with posters of Mesa sunrises, big Southern skies, and wild, roaming horses. Here, then, we see the interconnectivity of the autonomous/heteronomous poles of American authentic experience, in which a modern economy informs a desire for autonomous authenticity which, in turn, feeds back into market forces which commodify said authenticity. This bouncing back and forth between autonomy and heteronomy, between authentic experience and the forces that commodify it, continues to this day. It is something we will see run rampant in the Sundance Film Festival, where the image of Utah mountains and blue skies appear throughout its marketing materials, an autonomous, allegedly authentic wilderness experience being made available to consume by heteronomous forces.

This is furthermore especially evident in discussions of the “Experience Economy,” as hypothesized by James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II. According to Gilmore and Pine, the economy has shifted towards an exchange of experiences, rather than goods and services, and integral to this economy is a perceived authenticity of said experiences (1). As a result, businesses must learn, as Gilmore and Pine note, to *render* authenticity (3). However, as is evident in Hinsley Jr., as well as in the era of Thoreau et al., the need to render authenticity is not so new as Gilmore and Pine seem to believe. Rendering authenticity, as I argue, is fundamental to not only Western image-making, but American identity, and in particular, masculine American identity. However, it is important to understand how this authenticity plays into not only political, masculine frameworks, but also participates gladly in economic exchanges. It is here, especially, that Bourdieu’s autonomous/heteronomous divide—or rather, its hand-holding synergy—becomes most explicit in the American conception of authenticity. The economic and masculine sides of authenticity are evident from the earliest days of America’s development, from Thoreau and Roosevelt, to Remington and the commodified desert landscape.

For the purposes of my thesis, then, how does this play into the formation of Robert Redford’s own persona? Furthermore, how does this, in turn, have an impact on the Sundance Film Festival? Redford’s entire authorial persona, as both star and director, is deeply enamoured

with and informed by this complex web of American authenticity, from its confessional aspects to its masculine traits, its economic commodification to its Romantic vision of the westering adventurer. Redford's autonomy as an artist is forged in the *myth* of the American west. In connecting then to the Sundance Film Festival, he brings his unique auteur capital and authenticity to the festival, acting as habitus to the festival's field, and imbuing it with all of his ideals of American authenticity.

In order to understand how this relationship functions as a means of seeing the festival, we must first discern Robert Redford and his persona. What norms and values is Redford putting forward? What image is he constructing, and what kind of ideology is this reinforcing?

### **The Extraordinary Biography of Ordinary Bob**

In *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Richard Dyer writes, "How we appear is no less real than how we have manufactured that appearance, or than the 'we' that is doing the manufacturing ... However, manufacture and the person ... are generally thought to be more real than appearance in this culture" (2). In approaching the persona of Robert Redford, I will first look at the process behind manufacturing his appearance—not physical, necessarily, but persona-wise. Exhibit A: his official biography, written by Michael Feeney Callan—as an aesthetic, narrative, and cultural object, what does this biography say about Redford, and what persona is it aiding in constructing?

Callan's biography of Redford begins with an epigraph from Henry David Thoreau's *The Maine Woods*, in which the Transcendentalist asks "*Who are we? where are we?*" (xi). Right at the beginning of this book, then, Redford is connected to the development of American authenticity, a Thoreauvian look at what matters in this world. Furthermore, by using this quote as the opening epigraph, Callan casts Redford in a similar mould as Thoreau, a man asking grand questions, as they pertain to the real, authentic experience of the world (often, the natural world, at that). Redford, then, becomes wrapped up in the formation of this history of masculine authenticity and self-fulfillment, but Callan soon takes it further. The biography, after all, begins not with his birth, but hundreds of years earlier. After the introduction, in the book's first chapter, Redford's family history is described as a story "of rebels and outcasts" (5), and certainly that image is encouraged as Callan relays the epic ties Redford has to at least one prominent historical figure. Reaching back to the fourteenth century, Callan connects Redford to

his ancestor Henry Redford, a Speaker of the House of Commons (5), foreshadowing Redford's own political interests. The rest of Redford's clan were more common folk—outcast Catholics of the seventeenth century, an unemployed garment industry worker from the mid-1800s, a mandolin-playing barber in Pawcatuck, Connecticut in the late nineteenth century (6). As Redford himself describes his family: “We were all just horse dealers, dope addicts and dropouts.<sup>8</sup> None of my grandparents wanted questions and answers. But they were all storytellers” (5). The message, in these early pages of his biography, is clear: despite his ancient ties to the systems of this world, Redford comes from a line of outcasts and frustrated artists, troublemakers and stubborn political renegades.

However, he is further connected, by proximity more than anything, to other famed figures in American masculine history. Callan relays a strange story of Redford playing with his childhood friend Waverly Scott. One day, the two of them accidentally witness Waverly's mother, Elaine, having sex with John Steinbeck, the writer of *Of Mice and Men*, *East of Eden*, *Grapes of Wrath*, and other “great American” texts. “I didn't know who he was,” Redford says, “but later on he became a player on the family scene. He started coming around a lot more. He started to carpool us” (28). Redford grows up then connected—however loosely—to a canonical American writer, one steeped in classic Americana, masculinity, and outsiders. In the past, Steinbeck has been praised by writers and critics for his supposedly macho, Proletarian vision of his masculine characters, yet, as J.M. Armengol writes, “Rather than embody hypermasculinity, most of Steinbeck's male characters do actually seem to opt for a softer, less aggressive, more ‘feminine’ pattern of manhood based on tenderness, sweetness, companionship, and (working-class) solidarity with each other” (64). This, then, supports a specific, yet complex vision of Redford's own masculinity; he is the thoughtful man, not given to undue aggression or overly hard appearances, a man of friendship, rather than antagonism. Here too, there are contradictory forces at work—the gentle Thoreauvian who indulges his woodsy masculinity even while venturing out to the city, the tender American male who subverts masculine tropes even while indulging in the patriarchy of the literary canon. Callan's biography of the fair-haired Redford works quickly to construct a picture of Redford as an authentic, American, complex, masculine artist. The book seems to say that, with such a childhood—born to a line of Scottish storytellers

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<sup>8</sup> Even in Redford's speech patterns, we see the tools of figurative language at play, the alliteration in this sentence giving romantic rhythm to his language and therefore his persona.

and American artists, and connected to the American genius of John Steinbeck—it would seem inevitable that Redford would become the figure of Americana he is today, one that, as we will see, he further elaborates and capitalizes on in his films and his work with the Sundance Film Festival.

Redford's childhood was not all mysterious mandolin players and famous American authors, but his biography is still marked by other archetypal masculine figures of American authenticity. Foremost among them is his grandfather on his mother's side, Tot, who Redford met on a boyhood trip to Texas with his mother, which Callan describes as "a storybook" (19). He writes, "Under cathedral skies, in the dense forests around the lake, the precocious five-year-old [Redford] was handed fishing rod and gun and initiated into the ways of the wilderness" (19). Redford himself calls Tot "the manifestation of everything I'd heard about frontiersmen-heroes multiplied a thousand times" (19). Again, Callan, and Redford, places the auteur-star within a frontier-context, thereby contributing to an image of a star who is most at home in wilderness, surrounded by Utah mountains and tall thickets of trees.

However, Callan then stitches together this bid for wilderness with the more restless portrayal of Redford's youth, with Callan weaving the biographical narrative between his grandfather's Texan storybook, his father's claustrophobic Connecticut family, and his own Californian childhood with his absent father and his put-upon mother (20). Wilderness, then, has multiple meanings in Redford's biography, much as authenticity has historically. Redford, in response to the restlessness of his youth, packs his bags for Europe to pursue art school, moving to Paris before then heading to Florence. Callan describes this period as Redford's "Orphean descent," in which the aspiring artist became skin and bones and lived on pasta and cigarettes (49). While there is something startling in how Redford describes his final Italian breakdown—"Staring in the mirror, I saw someone I didn't recognize at all. I began to hallucinate. I couldn't see flesh or bones, but I saw through the skin into some indescribable new entity" (50)—it is also romanticized to a degree. Redford is a gaunt, artistic figure skulking about the streets of Florence, heart-broken but righteous, having undergone a massive breakthrough in which he realized he had never been an authentic person until then, a realization that couldn't have happened without this beautifully sad voyage to Italy. He had to be purified. The narrative further contributes to Redford's image as fundamentally related to place, and, perhaps most of all, authenticity. In many ways, Redford, while he may be heading East, is mimicking here the

western sojourns of Roosevelt et al. It is a different type of wilderness, granted, but still one in which he can abandon the comforts of modern life for the squalor and autonomy of the authentic man's life. Indeed, much like Roosevelt, he even commits to this journey after the death of his mother in 1955 (43). The voyage of discovery may have a different meaning, here connecting to the restlessness that Redford is seen to have since his childhood, but it also participates gladly in the western male archetypes that flourished in late-19th century America. The biography, in narrativizing Redford's sojourn east, again places him alongside those westering adventurers and pseudo-ascetics. Yet, we must remind ourselves, that this is part of the Redford package, a material that contributes to building some picture that the public can then associate with certain norms, values, and contradictions.

Even when Redford becomes an actor, training at the American Academy of Dramatic Art, Callan uses quotes and language that focus on Redford as being preoccupied with authenticity—as well as the masculinity of his image. During his time at AADA, for example, Redford was cast as Konstantin Treplev in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Instructors at the theatre school had found Redford awkward and oppositional (Callan 59), and his work as Treplev was no different, beginning with his fundamental disagreement with director Francis Lettin's interpretation of the part. In Callan's biography, Redford says, "Lettin saw my character as a wounded, soft, desiccated boy ... I disagreed. This was a radical work, designed to knock down the barriers of melodrama. I saw in Treplev insanity, passion and anger" (64). He goes on to describe Treplev's Oedipal complex, his desire to sleep with his mother, and expressive physicality (64-5). While Lettin was opposed to the interpretation at first, he eventually conceded to Redford's aggressive performance. It was a hit. According to Callan, the success of the play, as well as another performance in Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* a month later, was largely a result of Redford's "independent thinking, risk and experiment" (65). However, it also goes to show the actor's fear of appearing "soft" or "desiccated." Here, again, we see the fear of an emasculating force. Callan configures Redford's image in his biography as an independent—or rather, autonomous—artist who refuses to be anything which he is not. As such, the biography contributes to the construction of Redford as authentic, and furthermore as the prototypical Bourdieusian artist, one whose autonomous principles gave him cultural capital, which he then converted into the economic capital of his financially successful career.

Callan's book, which features copious quotes from Redford himself which therefore allow him to give voice to himself, further portrays Redford as an author, an artist who authors his work and himself—an independent filmmaker. Of course, Callan's biography is not the only material which one must examine in trying to form a picture of what Redford's star-image and authorial persona is. For this, we must move beyond his biography to see how Redford's career as both an actor and director contribute to his persona, and therefore to his auteur capital. In finding the contours of Redford's capital and persona, the details of his work as habitus to the Sundance Film Festival-field will, in turn, become clearer.

### **Robert Redford as Actor, Star, and Author**

Near the middle of George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), Paul Newman is seen standing on a cliffside with a mustachioed Robert Redford. Mustache aside, Redford's hair is still coiffed carefully, that 60s side-comb balanced ruggedly with just enough dirt and grease to pull off his outlaw role—again, that balance between modern and traditional is evident. Newman and Redford haggle with each other. Newman, as Butch Cassidy, is trying to persuade Redford, the Sundance Kid, to jump off a cliff with him to escape a famed tracker. Redford wants to end things with a gun battle, but Newman insists on jumping. After some speedy back-and-forth, Redford blurts out that he cannot actually swim. He is not afraid of the jump, though—as Newman points out, it is the fall itself that is likely to kill them—but rather, the water itself frightens him. It is a rare crack in a demeanour that is more often silent and deadly. The Sundance Kid is a taciturn outlaw. When he is with a woman, he is the one in control, though he is strong enough to not care if she is out with his closest friend—indeed, if anything, she is simply a means of coming closer to him. Here, on the cliffside, we find a sudden burst of emotion, anger, and embarrassment, a chink in his masculine armour. Soon enough, Redford gathers himself up, and he and Newman are seen tumbling from the cliff.

While Redford had already starred in several movies—including *This Property is Condemned* (1966), *Barefoot in the Park* (1967), *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* (1969), and others—and would soon begin producing films such as *Downhill Racer* (1969) with his production company Wildwood Enterprises, the Sundance Kid would forever be his cinematic breakthrough role—or at the very least, the one he himself sees as his breakthrough, according to his biography (Callan xii). The role embodied the complex dynamics of his future career: a



friendly danger, a steely romanticism, a stoic aestheticism, a rigid masculinity. It all begins with Sundance, and it is telling, of course, that just over a decade after the world met Redford's Sundance Kid, he would name his arts empire accordingly, immortalizing the Sundance Kid in the hills and screens of Utah.

When we first meet the Sundance Kid, George Roy Hill's staging and Redford's own swaggering performance gives the audience a good idea of who this character is. In an early scene, Paul Newman's Cassidy is on the verge of being ousted by his own crew, the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang. As Newman pleads with the others, Redford's Sundance Kid sits on his horse, towering above everyone, and leaning to the side. He is further emphasized, or given importance, by being one of the only people to be shot in close-up. Every other figure—even Newman—is in medium close-up, but Redford and his mustache fill the frame. The close proximity allows the audience to witness his body language. He is tense, and yet his leaning figure puts forward an image of someone calm. He is only tense so he can act quickly to save Newman if he needs to—otherwise, he is in his element: calm, unmoving, silent. When he does speak, it is only in response to Newman. After joking about betting on Butch's opponent to make some money off his death, Butch stands below the Sundance Kid and requests that he kill his opponent if Butch dies first. Sundance responds with a subtle nod, quietly saying to Butch, "Love to." Hill's staging—Redford on his horse, everyone below him—and Redford's performance point to Sundance as a knowledgeable character. He sits above the others, watching carefully, ready to move at the slightest hostility. He is a god, ready to take others' lives into his hands if need be, and not worried over the deaths of others. He is also not in danger—even Butch's opponent is fine with Sundance sticking around—and it seems safe to assume that no one could truly oppose him at this point. He is too cool, too self-assured, and too dangerous. His quick dialogue with Newman seems to emphasize his taciturn nature, but also his bantering relationship with his pal Butch. He is the friendly outlaw, then, dangerous to anyone not on his list of friends, and seemingly invincible. The film ends with Butch and Sundance being overcome by a shower of bullets before shuddering to a halt in a freeze frame. The two criminals live on, therefore, even as the cacophony of gunfire overwhelms the scene. The hunt here is less for historical authenticity<sup>9</sup>—this is, after all, a film which sees Butch Cassidy ride a bicycle to the

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<sup>9</sup> Though authenticity is the reason Redford opted for the mustache. In his biography, Redford describes getting heat from the production over his mustache possibly losing the film some box

anachronistic tune of Burt Bacharach's "Rain Drops Keep Fallin' on My Head", a choice Redford was allegedly quite confused about (Callan 158)<sup>10</sup>—and more for an image of masculinity, of stoicism and romantic outlawry. Newman and Redford are immortals on the screen, ready to fight anything, and even leap off a cliff. But, as we see on the cliffside, with Redford's lack of swimming knowledge, their immortality is perhaps a fantasy.

That fantasy of endurance, of ceaseless persistence in the face of danger, wilderness, or something else, remains throughout his career, including in the film with which I open this chapter: Sydney Pollack's *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972). Early in the film, Johnson is a fresh-faced sailor, on his way further inland to encounter the wilderness of America. While Johnson is not as knowledgeable in the ways of the mountain man as he later becomes, the film does not waste time in showing Redford's own dedication to the part. When Johnson ventures out to the woods and finally grows his frontiersman beard, he also attempts to catch some food. It is winter, and Redford can be seen traipsing through the cold water. He dips down over and over again, piercing the river with his bare hands to try and catch a fish. He does not succeed, but he comes very close. This happens almost entirely in one long take. In long shot, we see Redford, in time, run through the water. It is he himself, the movie star, putting himself at risk, just as a real mountain man would. The filmmaking supports the audience's picture of Redford as being the modern equivalent. Later, when Redford must fight off several wolves, and the editing suddenly launches into a quickened, frantic pace, bouncing back and forth between wolves with teeth bared, and the manly Johnson punching fur. The authenticity of Redford in the role seems wholly intact. He is the westering adventurer, a contemporary vision of the myths of Roosevelt, Remington, and Wister. He is the masculine mountain man whose authenticity trumps even the John Ford westerns that contributed to its myth.

This bid for authenticity through performance recalls aspects of Constantin Stanislavski's "Method," an acting technique which hit the United States and gained popularity in the 1940s

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office. "But I was emphatic it stayed," Redford says, "because that was the way those bandits looked at the turn of the century. It was authentic" (Callan 148).

<sup>10</sup> Again, Redford's admission in his biography of not agreeing with or understanding this music choice in the film allows for his persona to remain loyal to authenticity. Redford's image in his biography, therefore, continues, even in his own brief asides, to show that, despite film choices that might oppose his screen image, he is still the authentic Redford.

and 50s (Schneider 32). According to Jon Leon Torn, Stanislavski was hoping to access true authenticity in performance, something that “can only be achieved, acquired, created through assiduous practice” (3). As Molly A. Schneider describes, “the Method is not simply an observable acting style but also a system of *preparation* for performance. Somewhat paradoxically, practitioners of the Method employ extensive study and experimentation in order to learn how to remain authentically and spontaneously ‘in the moment.’” (31). This Method quickly achieved prominence through its extensive use, according to Schneider, in teleplays and dramas that looked at the quotidian lives of everyday, “unglamorous and maladjusted” Americans (30). Curiously, while Callan’s biography certainly constructs an image of a performer with connections to the “Method”, the book quickly distances the actor from it. When recounting stories of Redford’s graduation from the AADA, Callan notes how Redford and some of his classmates were itching to study with Lee Strasberg, who had used the Method for his classes at the Actors Studio in New York (66). However, they were quickly put off by its fanciful, mystical, repetitive posturing, with Redford calling it “just as contrived as AADA” (67). Despite the Method’s connection to authentic emotion in acting, even it is not authentic enough for Redford’s star-persona—all that *preparation*, his biography seems to suggest, does not lend itself to authenticity, but simply play-acting. Instead, his persona is constructed by wildly hopping into the cold water, with no need for the mannered pretense of Brando or the melodrama of James Dean.

Yet, something is also amiss with this bid for authenticity. Redford, in all his prettiness, is also almost too put together in *Jeremiah Johnson*, especially when put in comparison to other performers. Late in the film, when Johnson accompanies members of the U.S. Army Cavalry to retrieve a wagon train, there is a marked contrast between Johnson and the Cavalry. Each member of the cavalry is dirty, marked by their time in the wilderness. There is an attempt, with these characters, for period-correct wardrobe and styling. Their clothes look dusty and worn, their faces are marked by muck and uneven tanning, and their teeth are crooked, chipped, and yellowing. These men are juxtaposed against Johnson, who, even while living in the woods for so long, and having worked on boats before that, has shining, permanently white teeth. Their hair is dark and dusty, while his is golden. There could be symbolism at play here, but it is ham-fisted, and flies in the face of the film’s own emphasis on its authenticity. Indeed, the production and Redford have claimed to be conscious about this aim for authenticity. Instead of shooting in

Spain, they opted to shoot in Redford's own American backyard in Utah and Colorado (Callan 169). According to his biography, Redford recalls reading the novel upon which the film was based: he says, "I made some simple connections: the Rockies, where I lived, wilderness, authenticity, the men who cracked the frontier, truth."<sup>11</sup> I told Sydney, 'We can do this *the authentic way*. There's no other option. Let's go'" (Callan 169). Authenticity is presented then, as it was with *Sundance Kid*, as being of paramount importance to Redford; yet, there Redford and his perfect teeth are, constant reminders of his heteronomous stardom. While it adds something to his own star image—we see Redford, not simply Johnson, live in the wilderness, and it is therefore Redford, clear as day, with whom one might associate this Rooseveltian endurance—it places a strain on the film's own authenticity.

In the *New York Times* review for *Jeremiah Johnson*, Roger Greenspun writes,

The quality of legend pervades Sydney Pollack's 'Jeremiah Johnson,' which stars Robert Redford in a role that must be very real to his own mind and feelings. It is a very attractive role, and Redford plays it with a reticence and directness that also seem as much a part of the man as of the performance. (23)

Redford's portrayal of Johnson paints a complicated image of the performer, and the film's techniques—long takes and authentic setting—go a long way in connecting the two entities. In light of this performance and film, Redford's star image becomes focused on authenticity, on searching for the real in an artform that thrives on artifice.<sup>12</sup> Decades later, this would remain with him, with Redford even considering the film his favourite of his own filmography, citing as his reason that "it was all about continuing" (395). In the film, Redford is immovable, a force of nature that battles anything that comes his way. Redford's star image, his public persona, then, is in line with this kind of endurance, this test of one's mettle. He is, therefore, an authentic

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<sup>11</sup> Redford is listing the values that can be associated with his constructed image: wilderness, authenticity, frontier masculinity. Again, the quotes and how they are phrased in Callan's biography of Redford successfully paint a complete picture of the man—that is, as his image is meant to be seen.

<sup>12</sup> When Redford was a boy, he allegedly lost interest in movies for exactly this reason. "I'd always had a problem with authenticity," he says in his biography, "... it bothered me that Gene Autry couldn't walk right and John Wayne couldn't ride right" (Callan 59). Here again, Redford's persona is constructed as being entirely committed to authenticity.

frontiersman himself. The film, and his movie-star looks, remind the viewer, however, that this thirst of authenticity only goes so far. In *Jeremiah Johnson*, Redford's star image—the macho man whose teeth shine brightly even in the muck of the wilderness—becomes marked simultaneously by both authenticity, then, and artifice.

This search for truth and authenticity would only continue in *All the President's Men* (1976), which Redford both starred in and produced.<sup>13</sup> In the film, Redford plays Bob Woodward, one of the real-life journalists who cracked the infamous Watergate scandal during Nixon's presidency. Woodward is portrayed as being doggedly after the truth, consulting sources in dark parking garages while typing away at revelatory stories in the brightly lit offices of the Washington Post. Once again, he is a quieter, stoic character, not nearly as excitable as his fellow reporter, Dustin Hoffman's Carl Bernstein. The film once again, through juxtaposition, shows Redford as the seeker and spinner of truths, a rogue looking for a confession from the most powerful figures in the country.

The film became, for Redford, an important beacon of truth in its era. "I thought the timing of *All the President's Men* very fortunate," says Redford, "because it was a very honest and unpolluted film. I'm not sure if we could have managed it in its purity a decade or two later" (Callan 233). Once again in his biography and his films, Redford is presented as a participant in *pure* cinema, the kind untainted by the jittery commercial concerns of just a few years later. Certainly the film itself contributes to this vision of Redford as the truth-teller and political disturber, and it is, once again, in keeping with his previous star-image as a light of authenticity. This authenticity was hand-in-hand with a kind of commercial savvy, however, which would continue into the 1980s when Redford would finally take a seat in the director's chair.

### **Redford as Confessor, Author, and Habitus**

In 1980, the same year that Redford held his first meeting for the arts initiative that would become the Sundance Institute, the actor released his directorial debut, *Ordinary People*. Starring Mary Tyler Moore, Donald Sutherland, Judd Hirsch, and Timothy Hutton, the film would go on to win four prestigious Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Hutton, Best Adapted Screenplay for writer Alvin Sargent, and Best Director for

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<sup>13</sup> The film's opening credits even call the film, "A Robert Redford-Alan J. Pakula Film," citing both Redford and the film's director.

Redford himself. The film netted an additional two nominations in the acting categories for Moore and Hirsch. *Ordinary People*, based on a novel by Judith Guest, follows an upper-middle class family in a posh suburb of Chicago. After the death of their son, and the attempted suicide of their other son Conrad (Hutton), parents Calvin (Sutherland) and Beth (Moore) attempt to restore their family to a stable position. Conrad, however, has difficulty returning to his previous life, and begins seeing a psychiatrist (Hirsch), who helps him parse his feelings. Calvin and Beth's marriage, meanwhile, begins to disintegrate as Calvin becomes more interested in being honest about their own trauma and grief, something Beth would prefer to repress. Redford describes his own approach to the film, explaining, "I had a view of this family, of where it fell down through lack of talking, plain and simple, and I wanted to portray that on-screen, I suppose, as a kind of observational comment about the state of marriage in America at the end of the twentieth century" (Callan 270). Here, Redford presents himself in relation to confession, the need for confession in the United States.

Reviews were mostly positive, affirming Redford's staid approach to the material. In their September 17, 1980 issue, *Variety* praised Redford's debut as "the height of craftsmanship across the board. Robert Redford, well-suited for Donald Sutherland's role, stayed behind the camera to make a remarkably intelligent and assured directorial debut that is fully responsive to the mood and nuances of Alvin Sargent's astute adaptation" (18). The article thereby contributes to Redford's image by making it appear almost as if Redford had dutifully stepped aside so as not to overwhelm the project, well-suited to the part though he may be. Instead, he focused on the directorial, artistic task at hand. They go on to praise Redford as he "keenly evokes the darkly serene atmosphere of Chicago's affluent North Shore and effectively portrays this WASP society's predilection for pretending everything is okay when it's not" (18). Two days after *Variety*'s review, Vincent Canby, in the *New York Times*, similarly praised the film, calling it "a moving, intelligent and funny film about disasters that are commonplace to everyone except the people who experience them" (C6). He describes how effectively Redford portrays "the inability to express affection" before piling on the praise, writing, "[*Ordinary People*] doesn't look like any director's first movie. With the exception of fleeting flashbacks, which are necessary, I suppose, for exposition, the film's manner is cool, gentle, reserved. It never forces the emotions" (C6). Even, then, when Redford is not performing, he is reviewed—and therefore, his public persona is continuously constructed—for his authenticity, his honesty. The critics focus on the

ordinary, reserved qualities of the film, with Redford as the *honest, authentic* filmmaker: the autonomous artist who does not need to venture toward *Jaws*-like blockbusting,<sup>14</sup> but defines and positions himself as an artist of the everyday.

Thematically, Redford once again focuses his attention on the hunt for authenticity, this time, through the power of confession. Not sharing one's feelings is the equivalent of hiding who a person truly is, which, in the film, is something to be feared. When Conrad, the surviving son, is asked whether any place is easy for his anxiety, his first thought is the hospital, which he has just left. In the hospital, he says, nobody hides anything. Truth, then, lies at the margins, in the places where people divulge their secrets, their illness, their reality. At another point in the film, while jogging, Calvin, the father, grows so bored and irritated with the language of commerce he overhears, that he runs off the path, to be on his own, away from the inauthentic language of money. In order for communication to be valuable, the truth of oneself must be communicated, and that truth must not be valued in currency. Later in the film, when Calvin has had an epiphany and wants to chase after honesty, he butts heads with Beth, who does not want to expose her deepest feelings or her pain. As a result, Calvin believes he does not really know who she is. In an interview with Janet Maslin, Redford is described as hoping Beth "would not be regarded as the film's villain" and that her lack of flashbacks—which both Calvin and Connor experience—is meant to communicate her self-control, which he describes as a strength (D17). The film itself, however, does not seem to support this, instead refusing her any real point of view. During the final argument between Calvin and Beth, Calvin is explicit with this: "You're determined, Beth, but you're not strong," Calvin says to his wife. To not be honest with one's feelings, to not share those internal conflicts and issues, is, in the film, a weakness.

In this sense, Redford's film echoes the larger cultural drive in America toward therapy and, to return to Foucault, confession. In *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-*

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<sup>14</sup> In Callan's biography of Redford, the actor notes his concern over the advent of *Jaws* and other blockbusters, saying, "*Jaws* was a good, populist movie. But it became the flagship for a campaign that overtook American movies. It became a very slick process, advertising directed, about selling popcorn and product placement" (233). The book, with Redford's quote, once again positions the actor-director as worrying about commercialism, and being far more invested in the autonomous, artistry-driven side of things than the more heteronomous principles of moviemaking.

*Fulfillment*, Eva S. Moskowitz argues that therapy and the interminable pursuit of happiness have taken on religious dimensions in the United States. Tracing the development of what she calls “the therapeutic gospel” (6) from followers of the New Thought, who believed in intense psychological excavation, to its broader spread via women’s magazines in the 1950s, and on into the 1970s when “many Americans became preoccupied with their identity. They sought to uncover their true selves and to eliminate their ‘hang-ups.’ Self-awareness became the new religion; trust, intimacy, and communication, the gospel” (218). *Ordinary People* was released just as the “me” generation attempted to overthrow what they reportedly viewed as America’s inhibited, antiexpressive ways (Moskowitz 219-20). The kind of ways that, at least in *Ordinary People*, can damage relationships and lead to seriously destroyed, inauthentic lives. The film also carries the American therapeutic gospel’s emphasis on self-exploration, the sharing of feelings, the importance of therapy, and open confession. In this paradigm, without confession, one does not remain authentic. In the film, it is the men who learn to become open with their confession, who both confess and attempt to take confession. In light of what has already been explored in Foucault, it is the men, then, that have the power, controlling both their own confessing output, as well as the people whose feelings they would like to retrieve.

In the film, women seem almost incapable of being honest with their true feelings. This is most explicit with Beth, but it is true of other female characters as well. When Conrad meets up with Karen, a young woman he encountered while at the hospital, she tells him that all is well with her, and furthermore, appears almost taken aback by Conrad’s own desire to return to the hospital, away from his current life. Later, we realize that Karen was having more trouble than perhaps even she realized, and it is revealed that she has committed suicide, something which sends Conrad reeling. Another young woman, Jeannine, seems to have cracked the honesty code, though. When Conrad and Jeannine are on a date at a bowling alley, everything seems to be going perfectly. The conversation appears truthful, with Jeannine asking Conrad about his suicide. It is the kind of honesty the film wants to support, Jeannine the rare female character to have figured it all out. But then the conversation breaks down as several rowdy boys launch into the bowling alley and distract Jeannine. She starts laughing, which immediately shuts Conrad down. In the car ride after, Jeannine tries to rectify the situation, asking more questions, but Conrad will not open up. Here, it seems that Jeannine is the honest one, but later, she is put to blame for it. Conrad goes to her house days later and is about to apologize for how he handled



things, but she interrupts him, apologizing for laughing and saying it was her fault. Similarly to the other women in the film, it comes down to her not knowing what to do with her true feelings. “Conrad,” she says, “I was stupid. It was dumb of me to laugh. It was my fault. I just didn’t know what to do, I was embarrassed.” When Conrad asks what she was embarrassed about, she points to the rowdy boys, and explains that she laughs when she gets embarrassed. Jeannine is certainly the one female character who seems more at home with honesty, more accepting of her feelings and her ability to communicate them. She does, after all, communicate all this to Conrad. However, just as his father does with his mother, it is Conrad who instigates the feelings-session, and the overall sense is that men, in the world of Redford’s film, are the ones knocking at truth’s door, desperate to talk about their internal realities. These are, in the system relayed by Calvin, the strong ones, whereas women like Beth, as well as other female characters in the film, are weak, and cannot truly contend with their feelings. Men have difficulty with honesty as well in the film—much of its narrative shows the psychiatrist trying and failing to get at Conrad’s true feelings. However, they are also the ones who are desperate for authenticity, desperate for a period where conversation was truthful and not simply commercial—an autonomous confession, in Bourdieusian terms. *Ordinary People* takes place in the era in which it was shot, but there is something nostalgic to it, a longing that, years later, Redford will fulfill by reaching to the past.

Indeed, over a decade after *Ordinary People* premiered, and Redford’s career as a prestigious director with prime cultural capital was ensured, his third film as director, *A River Runs Through It* (1992), premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. Reviews for the film were mostly positive, if a little mixed. In the *New York Times*, Caryn James described it as “a film whose subtlety and grace disguise the fact that this is an artistically risky project” (H13). *Variety* was on the fence, calling the film “[o]ld fashioned, literary and restrained,” and further noting how both *Ordinary People* and *River* focused on families who have difficulty with their emotions, before then arguing, “the new film lacks the convulsive psychological traumas and depth of the earlier one” (84). Meanwhile, Kenneth Turan, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, thought Redford had almost killed Norman Maclean’s novella, on which the film was based, with “kindness” (1), accusing the film as being perhaps too reverent and safe. These reviews, then, are not of consensus, declaring the film as both *old fashioned* and *artistically risky*. This, if anything, only further constructs Redford’s public persona, hewing it in its contradictions,

devoted as it appears to be to authenticity, but also to commercial viability and convention. While this is built around the public, critical readings of his directorial work, here we see the same principles that Richard Dyer engages in his analysis of stars images, which he writes can be “characterised by attempts to negotiate, reconcile or mask the difference between the elements, or else simply hold them in tension” (1979, 72). Balancing the old fashioned and the risky, holding them in tension, Redford’s persona, as both director and star, is concretely constructed.

Based on Maclean’s novella, which gave a semi-autobiographical account of his own family, *A River Runs Through It* tells the tale of two brothers, Norman (Craig Sheffer) and Paul (Brad Pitt), and their preacher father, John (Tom Skerritt). Their mother, billed as “Mrs. Maclean,” and played by Brenda Blethyn, barely features in the film, which is, perhaps unsurprising given Redford’s persona so far, primarily about the men and their own issues and masculinity. Once again, there is a nostalgia for a time gone by. The opening credits sequence features copious amounts of sepia-toned photos. Later, as the camera sweeps over a Montana landscape, Redford, narrating as an older Maclean, describes it as a world “more touched by possibility than any I have since known.” Indeed, this film points to Redford’s own fascination with nature, and its relationship to masculinity. When the brothers go fly fishing with their father—a practice they did as children, with their father teaching them to cast their lines to the rhythm of a metronome—the camera looks lovingly upon both the natural world, with its dawn light and honey-hued textures, and the careful, rhythmic movements of the male body. When Norman returns home to Missoula after being away to the East Coast for school, there is a long fly-fishing scene where Norman watches his brother. In narration, Redford says that while Norman was away, Paul had quietly become an artist, innovating their father’s own steadied style. Soon, Norman joins in, and Redford keeps his camera tight on the brothers’ hands, on the labour and care involved in fly-fishing. These are tough, macho men whose true enjoyment comes from fishing, itself something that only comes from hard, precise work. These are the days when life was difficult, and men were, as Redford says in narration, “as tough as their axe handles.” The film looks back longingly to the past, just as Maclean himself might look longingly at his own past, to the days when he and his brother Paul would do silly things like canoe over a waterfall and miraculously survive.

In this sense, Redford is, once again, looking back to the westering adventurer of the late 19th century, and gesturing at classical American representations of masculinity and wilderness;

Redford's film, and therefore his authorial persona, is participating in a long tradition of masculine cinematic heroes, one that promotes the clear demarcation of gender roles. Cinematic masculinity is marked by stoicism and toughness, but, for Redford, it is not necessarily at the expense of authenticity or even honesty. In "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," film scholar Stephen Neale touches upon these strands in masculine representation, listing those traits often associated with masculinity in cinema, such as "aggression, power and control, ... narcissism and narcissistic identification" (5). Neale goes on to examine performers such as Alain Delon and Clint Eastwood, finding in them commonalities of silence, a suspicion of language, and emotional reticence (7). Redford, then, is both indulging in these tropes—fly-fishing as a state of purity, one that supersedes language; the father's only advice to his children as they learn to write is, "Half," informing them to be more concise and use less language—while also investigating their aberrations. Always, in keeping with Redford's persona and its lineage with masculine authenticity, truth is key to masculine flourishing. The son who enjoys investigating but not indulging language, Norman, is the one who succeeds in life, while Paul, who is good with manipulating language and telling quasi-truthful stories, but is nevertheless an artist when it comes to the masculine artistry of fly-fishing, is the son who falters and dies young. Redford is having his masculine cake and eating it too, leering lovingly, nostalgically at a precise, "natural" masculinity, while also commenting on where it might falter. Here, again, we see Redford's persona developing in its two-fold, both/and manifestation. He embodies traditional, taciturn masculinity, while still participating in a more contemporary, confessional authenticity.

This duality in Redford's authorial persona continues too in how he approaches storytelling from both a classical and metanarrative perspective. In "*A River Runs Through It*: Metanarrative and Self-Discovery," Joseph Kupfer explores the film's emphasis on stories, noting its two-edged qualities. He writes,

*A River Runs Through It* conveys its metanarrative meaning without ... stylistic virtuosity, employing instead such well-worn conventions as the flashback, voice-over, and embedded still photographs. Remaining within the bounds of the classical Hollywood narrative is appropriate to the film ... the metanarrative emphasis of *A River Runs Through It* concerns the value of narrative, and conventionally told narrative at that. (4)

Kupfer argues that the film's primary focus is on how storytelling can *edify* and *instruct* both audience and storyteller. However, in order for this style of narrative to work, it requires the right talent and, more importantly, morals: "humility, openness to criticism, and honesty about himself" (11).<sup>15</sup> Here, then, we once again have a case of Redford indulging his nostalgia for the old ways of doing things, in both its narrative content, and its loving, softly lit attention to recreating the past, and seemingly pushing forward a self-reflexivity that is altogether innovative. *A River Runs Through It* features both of Redford's public sides. He enjoys the old-fashioned, but desires his own innovation. That two-fold nature of Redford's persona only continued with his next film as director.

*The Horse Whisperer* (1998) follows Annie, played by Kristin Scott Thomas, and her daughter Grace, played by Scarlett Johansson, as they escape New York and head west to try and heal their horse Pilgrim, who has been traumatized by a horrible accident that opens the film. The film details how Annie, Grace, and Pilgrim are all healed via the no-nonsense skills of rancher Tom Booker, the titular horse trainer played by Redford, who directs himself for the first time. Indeed, in addition to whispering to the horse, he also whispers to women: Annie, a New York magazine editor, has no real roots of her own, and finds solace in both the landscapes of Montana and the masculine American hands of Booker; meanwhile, his easy, attentive nature also helps Grace find her way out of her own trauma. Again, the therapeutic side to Redford's persona becomes apparent, one in keeping with the aforementioned American tendency to favour the sharing of intimacies, of relating to one another confessionally.

At this point, having seen how Redford's films contribute to his persona's contradictory construction, one can expect to find oppositional forces at his work's centre, and *The Horse Whisperer* does not disappoint. Indeed, Timothy J. Brown notes the film's own polarities in his essay, "Deconstructing the Dialectical Tensions in *The Horse Whisperer*: How Myths Represent

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<sup>15</sup> If this is the case of Redford's film, it would be an interesting, if fruitless, task to perform on the film itself. Does the film's own attempt at edifying narrative work? If not, are we to blame Redford's own set of moral virtues? Does he, then, likely not possess the requisite humility, self-awareness, and openness? I do not wish to make moral judgments on Redford, and so will withhold from making an attempt, though his complex persona, which, as I show here, seems so often to contradict itself when it comes to so many things, including his own morality, would seem to suggest certain things.

Competing Cultural Values.” In his essay, Brown highlights the two primary myths at the core of *The Horse Whisperer*: that of the western and the metropolitan (275). Brown argues that the film indulges various western myths—the agrarian, the wisdom of the rustic, and the frontier myth, which we have seen in the forms of Roosevelt et al.—and puts them against the urban myths of city life, making for “a social commentary between two perspectives vying for widespread acceptance in our culture in the effort to create, define, and maintain power relationships” (275). Brown’s essay is helpful in configuring Redford’s film to his persona, in particular for how it reveals Redford’s own work as a habitus. Myths, Brown writes, “function to confirm, intensify, and reinforce attitudes, beliefs, and values” (277). Myths, then, function as a type of habitus, and Redford, in portraying them, uses them to reinforce certain norms. While *The Horse Whisperer* does have this dialectical tension, as Brown suggests, which contributes to Redford’s own dialectically oppositional persona, the film also seems to romanticize or support one myth over the other. It is, after all, the Stetson-toting Redford who heals the New York women: the western, Rooseveltian myth of masculinity prevails over the feminized metropolis. Brown’s essay, however, is helpful in understanding these myths, in particular for how the film uses them in relation to both personal authenticity and gender.

In the film, the Booker family, led by Redford’s Tom and his brother Frank, played by Chris Cooper, are held in direct contrast to Annie and her family. The Bookers are close-knit, while the Macleans are fractured, Annie and her husband, played by Sam Neill, trading in cold stares and harsh words, rather than the loving smiles and jokes of the Bookers. Furthermore, the Bookers do not follow the artificial ways of the city: following the idea of Brown’s agrarian myth (278), the Bookers live off the land. Brown highlights one scene in which Dianne Wiest, who plays Frank’s wife, makes a comment about Annie’s delicious pasta sauce (282). Upon learning that the sauce was bought, Wiest notes how she has only used bought sauce once in her life, and that Annie’s bought sauce is better. Not only does Wiest live exclusively off the land and function autonomously, rather than in relation to sauce-mongering corporations, but she is kind to Annie even when disappointed by the woman’s city ways. The film does not simply contrast the agrarian myth with the urban one, it actively supports it. As Brown writes, “Unlike urban society, which values immediate gratification, speed, and instant communication, the agrarian myth places value on patience, observance, and discipline. Through these values, individuals are able to interact harmoniously with nature” (283). The agrarian, western life is

depicted as the only authentic life; here in the west, unlike the skyscraper-filled eastern States, life can flourish. Annie and Grace are healed here, and even Annie's husband Robert is seen smiling for the first time when he ventures out west. Indeed, when Robert visits the Bookers and his own family in Montana, he has a small epiphany about his marriage to Annie, recognizing that she was never truly in love with him. The power of the agrarian, horse-surrounded life, however, is so strong, that Robert does not even mind this revelation. It simply is. He confronts Annie with this truth, and then moves on back to the city. The western myth is a curing myth; it heals wounds and reveals Redford's outlook of truth, confession, and authentic living. In the west, one is not bogged down by cell phones and commercial needs. There is only you, the individual, your community, and the land. Again, Redford's image is actively engaged in the Thoreauvian escape, the need to leave the perceived feminizing forces of the city and retreat to the masculine wilderness where self-fulfillment is possible, and women too can inhabit the roles this myth reinforces.

In regards to these gender roles, *The Horse Whisperer*, once again, adheres to the traditional models, revealing once again the patriarchal molds of the western, frontier myths. "In *The Horse Whisperer*," Brown asserts, "power relationships are reinforced because men possess all of the power in the western myth. What is overlooked in the nostalgic reflections of the romanticized agrarian, wisdom of the rustic, and frontier myths is that women are disempowered" (291). Redford's film is taking part in a long, patriarchal conversation about feminine power and the lack thereof. This is evident historically, as well—as I mentioned earlier, women were believed to have left the countryside, in part, to flee the abusive patriarchy that oppressed them there. Even those women who actively wrote about the wilderness in the mid-19th century supported a domestic fantasy of the women at home. According to literary critic Annette Kolodny, women were "to begin life as the dutiful daughter of loving but guiding parents and then assume a central role in a household of her own, serving there as the keeper of the symbolic hearth, spiritual guide to a loving husband and teacher and moral arbiter to their obedient offspring" (110). *The Horse Whisperer* does not, however, play with or subvert this part of the western myth, as Redford had done with the masculine image. Instead, it dutifully supports the "traditional" roles, looking upon them as the ideal female life experience.

When Annie loses her high-powered editor job, she is not upset, so much as relieved. It is not a matter of being bad at or not enjoying her job—when we have seen her working, she seems

effortless and perfectly content in her ability to direct her employees—but rather the job was but a distraction from her real life as a mother and as a hopefully dutiful partner to farmer Tom. She is only truly herself when she loses her position of power and succumbs to Tom’s teaching. There is a strange, dismaying equivalence between women and horses in the film. When Tom and Annie share a romantic dance, the camera lingers on Redford’s hands. He holds her, leads her, along the dance floor. It is as if he is molding or training her. Soon after, Tom is doing something similar to Pilgrim the horse. Pilgrim has just had a fit, and Tom leads the horse to lie on the ground, his hands gently consoling and training the horse, much as he did with Annie in their dance. Indeed, the entire film is built on the notion that a man alone, as long as he is of the western myth, can save women (and horses—there’s that unfortunate equivalency again) from their own dysfunctional positions in society. Much like the mother in *Ordinary People*, Annie cannot save herself, nor can she be honest with herself or articulate her real feelings. That is, until she meets Tom, who restores Annie to who she really is, according to the roles prescribed in Western mythology. Finally, as Brown notes, when Annie cooks a meal for the Booker family, Frank’s wife Diane is truly appreciative, if a bit suspect, as it gives her a break from her regular, wifely duties. The film, however, does not disparage or reject these fixed roles, but rather suggests they are correct and allow for better living. Instead of a kind of tension or dialogue between two opposing worldviews, then, the narrative and tone seem wholly to support the western myth’s more traditional, old-fashioned approach to gender roles.

*The Horse Whisperer*, *A River Runs Through It*, and *Ordinary People* do not look favourably on the stuffy urban life; the country is, as far as these films are concerned, where the truth lies, and in this way, Redford’s image is working from a foundation of 19th century American masculinity and its corresponding authenticity. The autonomous/heteronomous divide is inherent to this tradition, as it is with Redford-as-artist. Redford has spent decades successfully straddling both the polarities of Bourdieu’s artistic fields, rendering him the perfect habitus for the further development of cultural norms and values. Indeed, many of these contradictory forces have, as I will show, found their way into the Sundance Film Festival. Over the almost four decades the film festival has been running, Redford has been publicly connected to it. Having been imbued with prestige at various film festivals and the Academy Awards, and having had a persona marked by copious economic capital, Redford becomes an excellent candidate to act as habitus to a blossoming film festival field. Sundance has had its share of popular filmmakers—it

has made and broken the careers of many, thereby supporting de Valck's own thesis—but its own prestige, norms, values, and traits can be understood to come not from the young independents, but instead from Redford's own grandfatherly guidance. To understand Redford and his capital, is to understand Sundance.



### Chapter 3: The Sundance Trail

For the 2017 Sundance Film Festival, over 13,000 films were submitted for consideration. This then had to be sifted down to 181 films screened in 9 theatres, as 71,600 attendants milled about the small Utah resort town of Park City. It is a far cry from the Festival's earlier years. In 1985, for example, just seven years after its inaugural year in 1978, the Festival—then known as the U.S. Film Festival—screened just 86 films in two theatres. Between 1985 and 2017, the Festival's staff exploded, going from a crew of 13 people, to a mob of 224 labourers, planners, and other workers (“33 Years of Sundance...”). It has seen the premiere of small regional films that went on to bring in huge box office, such as Court 13's New Orleans-made *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), starring a cast of local unknowns, as well as larger fare like the Lionsgate-produced thriller *A Most Wanted Man* (2014), starring bonafide movie stars Philip Seymour Hoffman and Rachel McAdams. The Festival has been sponsored by both the Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development and massive conglomerate TimeWarner, the Utah Film Commission and Belgium's Stella Artois (*2014 Sundance Film Festival Program Guide*). Clearly, the Festival has had growth over the years, seen the premieres of films and filmmakers that would go on to accrue more capital—both symbolic and economic—than the little U.S. Film Festival might have ever imagined. It also, as with Redford before it, is the site of numerous contradictions and oppositional forces that both counter and support dominant ideology. How are we to comprehend such an event?

Having learned about Robert Redford, I argue that we can now begin to formulate an understanding of the Sundance Film Festival. What is Sundance and how did it come to be? What does it mean to be independent? How is the Festival related to and reflective of a Redfordian habitus? Approaching the Festival with the same methods as one approaches a star and director, I will now look at how the Sundance Film Festival is represented in both academic and popular literature, before then examining what Sundance says about itself, in its promotional materials, its geographical location, and its programming. In this sense, the relationship between Redford and Sundance, between auteur capital and festival, between habitus and field, begins to crystallize, and the Festival's authenticity is fully rendered.

#### **Scholars on Sundance**

When it comes to scholarly attention to the Sundance Film Festival, the foundational text is Daniel Dayan's "Looking for Sundance: The Social Construction of a Film Festival." Published in 2000, Dayan's relatively brief, poetic article came early in the developing film festival studies field of research, offering an encompassing look at the various strands that make up the Festival. Dayan begins his article by discussing the concept of the performance inherent to social interaction. On Sundance, Dayan writes, "I saw the very existence of the festival as a *collective performance*, as an ensemble of behaviours that were referred to norms, watched as spectacles, and submitted to critical evaluation. There are norms about audiences. These norms are translated into behavioural sequences" (44). Dayan does not mention Bourdieu in his article—he is far more focused on observing the minutiae of Sundance than elaborating on its possible theoretical framework—but to my mind, his highlighting of the norms of the collective and their associated behaviours points to Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, which, as I have shown, acts as the collection of norms which informs a field's behaviours. He spends the rest of his article discussing these elements, attempting to draw the seemingly divergent strands into a more congruent whole. Yet, as he discovers, Sundance is, in his view, a "fragile equilibrium, an encounter between competing definitions" (45). One can recall the programming mentioned in my introduction, the variety of the competition films, yet, nevertheless, the coherence. Here again, my connection to Bourdieu is helpful in understanding this notion of a festival whose identity is founded on contradictions. We see the autonomous and heteronomous poles collide with one another, and yet, even in Dayan's analysis and further echoing Bourdieu, these do not annihilate each other, but rather, they are fundamental to the identity of the field itself (Dayan 46-7). Dayan posits that festivals, in particular Sundance, are sites of encounter between the autonomous and heteronomous.<sup>16</sup> Dayan sees this through to the various zones and audiences of the Festival, including journalists, filmmakers, festival organizers, and the geography of the space itself. Dayan's approach will be helpful in my own analysis of the Festival, offering a first-person perspective on what it is like to attend the festival as a spectator.

While Dayan's article offers a detailed look at norms and behaviours, he does not trace these norms or behaviours back to any particular source. Instead, he approaches it almost like some hallowed mystery, using religious language comparing the event to a "transfiguration" (51), as well as "some delayed bar-mitzvah" (50) to evoke something of the supernatural in

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<sup>16</sup> This is my own usage of Bourdieu's words, as Dayan does not explore this angle.

Sundance. And certainly, while Dayan recognizes the contradictory forces at play in Sundance, acknowledging the forces of both corporate interest and supposed artistry, he is extraordinarily complementary and effusive about the magic of the festival, indulging in the romantic narratives that surround it.<sup>17</sup> Sundance, he says, is where separated masses are now joined together at last, a mosaic of individuals that “demonstrates that Culture is not condemned to being either inauthentic or vernacular” (49). To this end, then, he seems to successfully take on the point of view of an excited, wide-eyed participant. However, while he delivers beautiful reflections and observation on the festival, Dayan’s article does not give in-depth, concrete analysis. The question, however, still remains at the end of his article: what unifies the diverse norms and behaviours that make up Sundance? To put it in Bourdieusian terms, what is the habitus that drives the Sundance-field’s actions? How do we understand Sundance, its beliefs, values, and ideology? As I argue here, and will further elaborate on, Redford holds the key, the filmmaking figure that lends auteur capital and authenticity to the festival, and whose norms and values encourage Sundance to be a site of collision and encounter.

Dayan’s article does support a relatively clear, if a little misty-eyed vision, however, of Sundance, and there is one important term I would like to explore before reflecting on other scholarly approaches to the Festival: that is, the terms “independent” and “indie,” both of which come up at various points in Dayan’s paper, and are imperative when it comes to studying Sundance. Media scholar Michael Newman uses these terms to refer to any form of expressive media—including music, film, or clothes—that “derives its identity from challenging the mainstream” (16). In “Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative,” Newman highlights the inherent contradictions to indie culture, which he says both opposes mass culture, and perpetuates privilege in its mark of distinction (17). Newman is more explicitly trafficking in Bourdieusian theory, in particular in his discussion of the artist’s need for authentic autonomy and in the theory of taste cultures, which Bourdieu explores in his book *Distinction*. In

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<sup>17</sup> Perhaps most exemplary of this is Dayan’s summary of these romantic narratives, when he writes, “They are video-rental clerks, service station attendants. They have invested their last dime in the movie they are showing. They cannot afford meals and live on cocktail foods. AT night they share a motel room with their whole crew sleeping on the floor. In the morning they find out that their hardly finished film has turned them into stars. This is perhaps the most celebrated aspect of Sundance: An American fairy tale. Cinderella with a credit card” (50).

his article, Newman notes how indie culture—a foundational concept for operations like the Sundance Film Festival—carries this oppositional stance to the dominant culture, only to then support the dominant ideology’s disproportionate inequality. In regards to Sundance, which Newman does not extensively comment upon, this is evident in its audiences, made up, according to Dayan, of “fellow directors, fellow actors, fellow writers, fellow critics, of all those who have, have had, would like to have, or will have, films in the competition” (51). Sundance appears as a sliver of the population, a distinct taste culture unto itself, that both supports itself and reproduces itself by not allowing illegitimate players into the scene. Newman quite rightly associates this with Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, a commodity to separate the indie from the riff-raff of the mass commercial product. “In other words,” Newman writes, “the imagined audience for indie culture is a cliché of liberal elites, and independent cinema is a consumer product to be marketed like an imported car or a magazine subscription” (24). You can imagine the advertisement—a vision of a lavish, but authentic-appearing lifestyle, complete with *eau de Sundance*, the finest American cinephilia you can buy.

Indie, for Newman, is a collection of values that encompasses both autonomous and heteronomous poles of a specific cinematic field. In this way, the concept of indie or independent cinema could easily be construed as a habitus-of-sorts for Sundance, the ideology that frames the Sundance behaviours Dayan discusses, in both its vision of authenticity and its more consumerist tendencies. However, indie still remains abstract—a broad term for a broad cultural base. As a habitus, then, there is much to be desired. Furthermore, indie, as a culture and pseudo-movement, is supported by industry figures who, as I suggest in relation to Sundance, also contribute to the construction of the culture’s norms and values.<sup>18</sup> I argue that it is these figures that can bring their pre-existent, and continuously developing, auteur capital—an embodied form of capital—to indie fields, importing the requisite values, but also a specificity with which the public can understand and operate within said field. This is the case with Redford and Sundance, the former

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<sup>18</sup> Critic Peter Biskind writes about this in his book, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film*, which I will explore more in this chapter. Briefly, however, Biskind cites figures such as Harvey and Bob Weinstein, in addition to Redford as the figures who both spurred on this movement, and capitalized on its commodities. Redford, then, could broadly be seen as one of the shepherds of the movement.

delivering his values and distinction to the latter, and imbuing it with capital, norms, authenticity, and further distinction and privilege.

The question remains, however: has the Sundance Film Festival benefited from this relationship? Has the cultural capital resulted in any change in economic capital? In practical terms, has Redford's name, and the Sundance branding, had an impact on what the film festival is identified as? For this, Matt Dee Cottrell's Utah State University M.A. thesis, "The Question Concerning the Cooptation of the Sundance Film Festival: An Analysis of the Commodification of Independent Cinema," is especially useful. Cottrell approaches Sundance somewhat problematically, romanticizing Sundance's early years, and setting up a somewhat simplistic divide between a generic "Hollywood" and a broad "independent" scene. For Cottrell, Sundance is never complicit in its own commercialization, or heteronomous tendencies. Instead, Cottrell points the finger at the monolithic Hollywood that, he says, invades the festival so as to commodify the formerly "authentic artistic projects" (7). Cottrell envisions the Sundance Film Festival as having "become a marketplace because it commodifies independent film" (17). He does recognize that independent American filmmakers are somewhat hogtied in their decision-making, doomed to either sell-out to the evil Hollywood, or while away their days and devote themselves to films that no one will see but at the very least, will have artistic integrity (13), and furthermore notes that there is "reason to question whether or not independent cinema ever really existed" (29). However, he still insists on setting up a false dichotomy between the concept of independent cinema and Hollywood. Furthermore, while Cottrell recognizes Bourdieu as being helpful in understanding this relationship between autonomous and heteronomous principles in the artistic field, he does not seem to connect the two sides, instead, still characterizing the heteronomous Hollywood as "infiltrat[ing]" the formerly autonomous Sundance (56). While I do not agree with how Cottrell characterizes the relationship between Sundance and Hollywood, I do appreciate his statistical analysis.

Working from statistics he gathered directly from the Sundance Institute—some of which are now available at the Sundance Institute's own website—Cottrell puts together a clear picture of the growth that Sundance has witnessed throughout the years. According to Cottrell, the Sundance Film Festival's number of screened films remained steady throughout the 1980s (37). Growth came more prominently in the 1990s, which Cottrell largely attributes to the steady success of independent films such as *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *The Brothers*

*McMullen* (1995), and others (37). Many, though certainly not all, of these premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, further linking concepts of financially successful independent cinema and Sundance. In Cottrell's thesis, he provides a helpful graph which shows the jump from 1989 to 1990, after the former year's breakout success of Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape*,<sup>19</sup> and another rise in 1994 (38). From 1985 to 2008, the number of films screened each year has steadily increased, save for a few years in which the number dropped slightly (1998). The same can be said for attendance numbers, for which Cottrell is able to reach back even further to 1983, before the Sundance Institute took on the festival's reins. His research reveals that attendance grew in 1985 after a dip in 1984, and marginally increased throughout the late 1980s before exploding in the 1990s. Cottrell again associates this largely with the films being screened—as independent films gained in popularity, Sundance became an opportunity for big Hollywood business to snap up the rights to the next big thing (45).

However, there is one other side to these statistics that I want to highlight. In Cottrell's research, there are some key turning points in the rising popularity of Sundance. In the 1980s, for example, attendance rises as the Sundance Institute begins managing the festival, and then again in the 1990s when the name Sundance—Redford's own character in one of his biggest movies—becomes attached to the festival. The Sundance Film Festival has gained in popularity ever since the early 1990s when Redford puts his name on the Festival, and while certainly shifts in direction and approach would also contribute to the Festival's success, this connection serves to further cement the importance that Redford's image has in this Festival.

What, then, does this say about what the Sundance Film Festival is? Certainly, in Dayan's analysis, a complex image is constructed of the Festival's ethos and ideology, while Cottrell's research reminds us of the steady growth the Festival has experienced since Redford became more firmly attached. But what is the Sundance Film Festival to the larger public? What kind of cultural capital surrounds the Festival, and what kind of values and behaviours does it purportedly have? For this, we must look to more popular reportage and analysis. Much as Redford's biography helps gain insight into what image is being constructed of Redford, a close reading of the ubiquitous popular literature on Sundance—from first-hand, behind-the-scenes accounts, to journalism in the industry trades—is helpful in seeing how Sundance is being formed in the public eye.

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<sup>19</sup> Soderbergh's film is examined in more detail later in this chapter.

### **The Public History of the Sundance Film Festival**

The most comprehensive, behind-the-scenes look at the history of the Sundance Film Festival is the aforementioned, relatively slim volume, *Party in a Box: The Story of the Sundance Film Festival*, by Lory Smith. Beginning in 1978, Smith's book paints a picture of a scrappy festival that, in the process of becoming shockingly successful, leaves a string of abandoned people—employees and supporters—on its way to fancier, more commercial things. While Smith is altogether positive about the festival, relaying how he holds Redford in “the highest esteem for his heartfelt commitment to offering divergent voices the opportunities for success” (230), he is also critical of the festival's contemporary management. Writing in 1999, Smith preempts Cottrell's own thesis, arguing that Sundance “has been co-opted by the very system [they] set out to change” (229). Smith, offering a first-hand account, is extraordinarily close to the situation, and therefore his book comes across as deeply subjective. However, it does offer an expansive overview of the festival's history, and is one of the rare texts to actually engage with the early years of Sundance, before Redford took the reins when it was known as the U.S. Film Festival.<sup>20</sup> Smith's book, therefore, is useful in understanding the key elements of the Sundance identity, the public image of the festival, and its history with Redford as well. Furthermore, just as Redford's biography contributed to the actor-director's image, Smith's volume, in addition to others that I will get to, participates in the construction of the festival's own public identity. In studying Sundance's history through this lens, we can see how Redford, with his ample auteur capital, functions as habitus to the Sundance field.

Beginning in 1978, Smith's book recounts nostalgically the initial vision, as laid out by Sterling Van Wagenen, Robert Redford's brother-in-law and founder of the festival. According to Smith, the festival's initial purpose was threefold: first, to attract key players in the film industry to Utah (5); second, to offer a retrospective program (6); and third, to start a competition for, “small regional films being made outside the Hollywood system, mostly in 16mm” (6). Smith characterizes this beginning as haphazard and instinctual, with most of the key players not

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<sup>20</sup> All of this is debatable, from what the name was to even what year the Festival began. While some, like Smith, claim the festival began in 1978 (Turan, *Sundance* 35; Thompson 5), Callan, in his biography of Redford, points to 1976 as the inaugural year of what was then known as the United States Film and Video Festival (284).

knowing what they were doing, and much of the screened films coming because of the draw of Robert Redford, chairman of the board at the time for the festival, and sometimes participant (8-9). Early on, Smith knew this was a relationship to exploit. Seeing as, according to Smith, “independent film had yet to be defined and articulated” (8), the festival had to rely on Redford’s star power to draw other filmmakers. Here, we can immediately see how Redford is bringing his cultural capital to bear on the festival. Redford, who, in 1978, had accrued plenty of cultural and economic capital, lends both his autonomous and heteronomous capabilities to the festival. As a beacon of serious cinema—the kind that opposes blockbusters like *Jaws*, for example—Redford brought authenticity to the festival, even in as tangential and superfluous a role as chairman of the board, which, in his biography, Redford characterizes as being nothing more than a “media magnet” (284). In Smith’s book, then, Redford is portrayed clearly as a figure who brings his auteur capital to bear on the festival. While he is not the founder of the festival, he was tied to it immediately, and Smith’s biography of the Sundance Film Festival creates a picture of a festival affected by its famous figures. The impact of Redford is unavoidable when looking at Sundance’s public image, and Smith’s book is not alone on this front.

The next turning point in the history of the Sundance Film Festival was the founding of the Sundance Institute in 1980. In *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film*, critic Peter Biskind describes the scene of that first, fateful Sundance meeting. He writes: “Self-effacing as always, Redford, surrounded by his collection of Kachina dolls, diffidently served beer to his guests from behind the bar. His modest posture . . . along with his Oscar-winning turn as director of *Ordinary People* a year later, would earn him the fond sobriquet, ‘Ordinary Bob’” (12). This echoes Smith’s own description of the Institute’s initial three-day planning conference, held in Utah at Redford’s estate. Smith, who claims to have been there, highlights how Redford poured the beer and appeared altogether approachable:

One was immediately struck by Redford’s native intelligence, obvious passion, careful thinking, and deep insight into his chosen profession, and his ability to concentrate on the subject at hand, take in the information, assess his perspective, then condense the details into a coherent frame of reference. It was obvious he wanted to hear what everyone else in the room thought. He also has an innate skepticism, especially for anything institutional. (36-7)



Once again, here, in Biskind and Smith, Redford is connected to Sundance, drawn together in the united charge of fostering independent, authentic, autonomous filmmaking to America. Not only that, but both Biskind and Smith highlight Redford's *ordinariness*, which I read as his *authenticity*. Redford is being connected to Sundance in his authenticity, not only as a filmmaker, but as a real human being, one who is not swallowed up in the prestige that clings to his every move, but rather, is simply standing behind the counter, serving beer to independent filmmakers. This is the same Redford that Callan constructs in his biography, the man who is preoccupied by and connected to authenticity, whether as a kid visiting his frontiersman grandfather in Texas, or as an actor performing in *The Seagull*. Redford's ordinary extraordinariness is furthermore presented as integral to the Festival. Smith describes Redford as "the perfect man to make [the Festival] happen" (37), with both his Hollywood credentials and artistic desires. If we understand Redford to be firm in both his autonomous and heteronomous tendencies, then Sundance too can be understood in such a way, its values and beliefs in independent, but approachable—and therefore economically feasible—cinema wholly embodied in "Ordinary Bob" Redford. This is a constructed image, but a deeply effective one, with Redford's capital as a filmmaker forming the image of the Sundance Institute, which would soon take on the festival. The Institute, Redford hoped, would be a haven for independent, authentic filmmakers of all backgrounds, and it would forever be nestled in the American heartland, away from inauthentic Hollywood in Robert Redford's magical backyard ski resort.

Redford had purchased the land in 1968, and slowly developed it over the years with an eye towards conservation. It is a place that, as described in Redford's biography, seems to have "some powerful organic mechanism of renewal" (Callan xi) and, for Redford, was ideally suited to his new arts lab. The Institute was Redford's true mission, with the festival seen as a necessary distribution measure<sup>21</sup>. Redford's hope for the Institute is presented as bringing independently minded filmmakers closer to the resources in Hollywood. In a 1983 *New York Times* piece, John Lombardi writes, "Robert Redford, activist and Hollywood superstar, says that in the high-

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<sup>21</sup> Biskind notes "Redford's publicly stated objection to festivals" (28), and this is confirmed in a 1983 *New York Times* article about the Sundance Institute, in which Redford is quoted as saying, "Above all, I didn't want it to be a film school or any kind of festival ... I never learned anything in school, and I'm not big on festivals because people aren't really exchanging ideas, they're just lecturing each other" (SM51).

pressure 80s, his program tries ‘to make art the core, and see if business can get around that’” (SM48). Lombardi’s article goes on to quote Redford as saying, “We’d like to provide an umbrella, an alternative to this incredible pressure, but not mollicoddle anyone. I’m not interested in the ‘independent’ filmmaker who ‘disdains’ Hollywood, but isn’t good enough to succeed there” (SM51). Redford positions his Institute as being about both art and commerce, both autonomy and heteronomy, and for Redford—and soon for the Sundance Film Festival—the two poles are connected. A filmmaker’s quality, for Redford, is legitimized by his ability to succeed economically and critically. While the hope is, as Bourdieu would say, to appear wholly autonomous, making art that core, Redford highlights the need for broader public success to be legitimized and distributed. Art and commerce, autonomous and heteronomous, activist and superstar—all were nestled in the bones of the Sundance Institute from its very beginning, and this dynamic is constructed in the public eye through the thousands and thousands of pages devoted to Sundance—both the festival and the institute—over the years.

In 1985, a few years after its creation, Redford’s Sundance Institute would take on the U.S. Film Festival, relocating it from Salt Lake City to the nearby Park City (Biskind 28; Turan 2002, 36; Thompson 5; Callan 10). This relocation is important, and I will explore it in more depth later in this chapter; however, first, I would like to examine how the literature characterizes this takeover, and how this portrayal further illuminates the extent to which Redford’s persona can be seen as a habitus to the Festival field. Taking control of the Festival reportedly made sense for the Sundance Institute, financially and as part of its mission. As Biskind writes, “the institute had only addressed the development part of the filmmaking equation. By ignoring marketing, distribution, and exhibition, it was virtually relegating itself to irrelevance” (28). Biskind, then, characterizes this as a strict business conversation that would, in turn, support the Institute’s ultimate goal of shepherding filmmakers. Smith, coming from the festival side of the conversation, sees the Sundance invasion as a wholly necessary event. The Festival was in a dire financial situation in 1984, and, as Smith puts it, “needed someone to ride in on his white horse and save us from our predicament” (84). Redford, and to a lesser extent, Van Wagenen, are attributed for saving the festival. Just as Christianity looks to the story of Jesus Christ for its values and modeled behaviours, so the Sundance Film Festival can be seen as adopting the norms and beliefs of its Messiah: Robert Redford.

According to popular literature and journalism, the Institute's acquiring of the festival made waves. In a 1989 article in the *New York Times*, Aljean Harmetz notes the subsequent boom: "Since 1985," he writes, "when the festival was taken over by Robert Redford's Sundance Institute, it has become the most prominent showcase for American movies that are financed and produced outside the Hollywood mainstream" (C17). Redford's name carries a lot of symbolic and economic weight. The 1985 takeover of the U.S./Utah Film Festival marked the next step in the Festival's evolution, in which Redford's auteur capital, his prestigious bonafides as a filmmaker and star, his mark of authentic cinema, is presented as having a real, tangible effect on the Festival. As I have already mentioned, in 1991, after a massively successful few years, the Festival took its next evolutionary leap and officially adopted its new and, as of now, final name: the Sundance Film Festival<sup>22</sup> (Turan 2002, 36). Here, clearly as ever, the Festival officially, explicitly names the relationship. Not only, then, does the Festival get its norms and beliefs from Redford, its habitus, but it even receives its name from Redford's celebrated character. The Festival becomes publicly imbued then with both his reputation, and his personality, the image of a mustachioed outlaw appearing with every utterance of the Festival's name.

According to popular literature and journalism, the Sundance Film Festival still exists largely because of Robert Redford. Some articles, like the one mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, even erroneously call him the festival's founder. While this is not accurate, it might as well be, since so much of the Sundance identity appears moulded in the image of Redford. In the public eye, then, with books like Smith's, Biskind's, and others, as well as massive amounts of journalism pouring into the public consciousness every year, the festival can be understood most clearly under this light, as an artistic field whose own capital amongst other festivals is informed by its relationship to authentic auteur-star Redford. Ordinary Bob brings his full symbolic weight to bear on the festival. There is more to the public portrayal of the festival, however, than journalism and gossipy books. What, after all, does the Sundance Film Festival have to say about itself? When looking at its public self-portrait—its marketing and communication, its geographical space, and its programming—what image is the Sundance Film Festival constructing, and how does Redford figure into that as habitus and bringer of capital?

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<sup>22</sup> In 1990, the film festival adopted a transitional name, the Sundance United States Film Festival, anticipating its full name change the following year (James, "A Film Festival..." 15).

### Sundance on Sundance

The Sundance Film Festival's official website is a subsection of the Sundance Institute's own website. This immediately places the Festival under the purview of the Institute, which makes sense, given it is owned and managed by the initiative. However, it also signals clearly that the Festival is not a thing unto itself, an event on its own. It is marked, controlled, and affected by forces outside itself, things that shape the festival into what it is today. The fact that the Festival does not have its own website encapsulates this in many ways: it is simply a menu item of the Institute's generic "Festivals" tab that lines the upper portion of the website's panel.<sup>23</sup> The Sundance Film Festival is here nothing more than a service offered by the broader arts initiative founded by the Sundance Kid himself, Robert Redford. There is, in some ways, something unassuming about this. While the colours for the 2018 festival are bright and brash, orange lettering against bright blue backgrounds, accented by the branded yellow of the Sundance Institute, the fact that the Festival itself does not have its own website—when, even in Redford's own biography, the Institute is seen to be quite dependent on the Festival's success, with 30% of its 1995 budget coming from the Festival (Callan 361)—connotes an ordinariness, as if it is not the main focus of the Sundance empire, the main draw.

In Daniel Dayan's seminal article on the festival, he describes Sundance as a "written festival" (52), with so much of its identity based in print—or, in today's world, online—by the aforementioned journalists, but also from Sundance itself. How, then, does Sundance write about itself? The 2014 program guide describes it as "attract[ing] the most innovative storytellers and adventurous audiences to a 10-day celebration of the best independent filmmaking today. In a small mountain town, a diverse range of ideas, stories, artists, and film lovers converge to launch the year in culture" (2). There are key terms and themes in these sentences that run through much of Sundance's messaging: *innovation*, *adventure*, *independent*, *mountains*, and *diverse*. In the Sundance Institute's 2016 Annual Report, for example, festival director John Cooper recycles this material, writing, "The Sundance Film Festival brings together the most original storytellers with the most adventurous audiences for its annual program..." (36). Writing on the Festival's new media showcase, New Frontier—itself named after the kind of historical frontier that Redford's persona is built on—Cooper begins by noting how Sundance is "[l]eading the ways in

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<sup>23</sup> As of December 2017.

which independent cinema is using innovation and new mediums” (36). The language here swirls around notions of innovation and originality.

This, once again, is in keeping with Redford’s persona as an innovator. In a 1991 *Los Angeles Times* article by Nina Easton, Redford is quoted as saying, “I’m not that big on anniversaries or celebrations of the past ... I prefer to look forward to the future” (1), encouraging an image of Redford and *his* festival as progressive, right on the cusp of whatever’s next in cinema. However, we have also seen how Redford clings to the past in films such as *A River Runs Through It* and *The Horse Whisperer*. How, then, does Sundance bear out this image of innovation? For some, it does so successfully and the Sundance Film Festival is at the vanguard—in 1992, for example, Sundance witnessed the birth of megastar director Quentin Tarantino with the premiere of *Reservoir Dogs*. However, while the film, which I will explore later in this chapter, ultimately became a massive hit, it was not celebrated by Sundance itself. It did not win the grand jury prize, which reportedly sent Tarantino over the edge, angry at this perceived injustice (Callan 363). Many lay the blame for Tarantino’s loss at Redford’s allegedly old-fashioned feet (Quirk & Schoell 184). This, Michael Feeney Callan notes in his biography of Redford, was considered “a perception problem” (363). According to Callan, the Sundance Film Festival had, for years, been largely known for its “granola” programming. This perception was, Redford says, “anathema to me ... I recognized where our earliest endeavors might have been misread, but the deduction was wrong. What I wanted in the labs was experiment. What I sought in the festival was variety” (320). Nevertheless, the perception persists.

The Sundance Institute and its accompanying film festival began carrying an image of being old-fashioned and granola in its early years—yet its primary mission statement was “to create opportunity for artists” (Callan 364) and support independent, authentic filmmakers. As Redford says in an interview with Mikelle Cosandaey: “It’s an entity to help new filmmakers with other kinds of stories to be told” (12). There is a clear tension here between what is presented as the festival’s driving motivation or intention and how the festival chooses to dole out its actual awards. It is a tension that mirrors Redford’s own star tension, the kind of oppositional forces that Richard Dyer argues are held in tension within the image of the star (1979, 72), and that mirror the dominant ideology’s own contradictions. In Sundance’s contradictions of tradition and innovation, we see a reflection of Redford’s own contradictions, themselves reflections of the myths of the American west, men lumbering into the west to forge

something new, all the while reverting to patriarchal practices of old. This is especially reflected in the language of *adventure* we see in Sundance's promotional materials, artists that mark new territory, yet are still able to work within traditional, neoliberal structures.

The adventure aspects are evident too in the landscape of the festival itself. Nestled in the Utah mountains, Redford's proverbial backyard, the Festival is literally set apart from the debauched, polluted landscape of Hollywood. The purity of those hills—the kind sought after centuries earlier by American men like Thoreau and Roosevelt—contributes to the festival as pure, and Sundance makes sure to remind those who may attend of its position. On its website, specifically the page devoted to the history of the Festival, there is an image of wintry mountains looming over tall coniferous trees, dusted with snow. You scroll down into the Festival's history and it is as if to remind the reader that the Festival was birthed in the heart of the mountains—which would be incorrect, given the Festival's original 1978 urban location of Salt Lake City. Nevertheless, the design choice reminds us that the Festival is held amongst nature, hidden away in the mountainous landscapes and under the big skies of Utah. *Come here*, it says, *and you can escape the commercialism of Hollywood. Come be holy in the hills of Utah*. It is as if, every winter, the film industry is reenacting a variation on the initial Mormon Trail of 1846 to 1847, in which Mormons traveled from Nauvoo, Illinois down into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, where the state's capital, Salt Lake City, would be founded (Hill 4). As William E. Hill writes, in his book on the Mormon Trail, tensions between Mormons and what they call their Gentile neighbours had reached a fever pitch in 1844 with the death of religious founder Joseph Smith, and soon after, the Mormons began to travel, led by Brigham Young on their hunt for the new Zion or Promised Land (5).<sup>24</sup> We see this kind of religiosity in Sundance too, with the marginalized, counter-cultural, authentic independent filmmaker running for the hills of Utah to find that pure, cinephiliac paradise. The Festival's geographical placement, in both its landscape and its national history, contributes, therefore, to its image of American frontier adventure and bastion of purity, a reflection of a belief found in Redford.

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<sup>24</sup>The fact that the Mormon Trail is now an official National Historic Trail, part of the United States' National Park Service, cements this as a key part of American history, which in turn, further contributes to the Sundance Film Festival's cachet as a particularly American festival.

Finally, in looking at the key terms from Sundance's own communications, I want to turn to its focus on being "diverse." According to multiple sources in popular literature, Redford began his Sundance Institute as a means of supporting both minority and women filmmakers (Quirk & Schoell 148; Biskind 10-1). In Tess Van Hemert's PhD dissertation, "International Acclaim: The Role(s) of the International Film Festival in Supporting Emerging Women's Cinema," she reflects de Valck's argument that dominant festivals, such as Sundance, are able to promote certain films and filmmakers, imbuing them with capital and elevating their status to a previously unseen level of prestige (176). Following this line of reasoning, then, Sundance has the capability of bringing minority and women filmmakers, marginalized populations in the film industry, to the forefront in both prestige and reputation. Van Hemert's dissertation includes case studies such as Kim Longinotto, a Sundance Film Festival alumnus, whose "international success as a filmmaker and her ability to sustain a career in the industry is inextricably linked to the recognition and support of her films by a range of different festivals on the international circuit" (177). Filmmakers like Longinotto become, in the current status of women filmmakers and the industry, beholden, in some ways, to festivals, dependent on finding the right festival to support their film and bring it to the world's stage. How, then, has this bid for representing minority populations and women rendered itself at the Sundance Film Festival?

Largely, this appears in programs in the Institute, including its Native American and Indigenous Program and its Women at Sundance program. The Women at Sundance initiative resulted in an initial increase in competition films directed by women. The program was introduced in 2013, which saw a 14% increase in films in competition at that year's Festival (see Figure 1 below). However, this competition has largely flatlined in recent years, stalling around the 37% mark. On Sundance's website for "Women at Sundance," they note that this is "markedly ahead of the mainstream industry," but that it is still a work-in-progress. While Sundance's initial 2013 initiative can certainly be applauded, it is curious that the work-in-progress has not experienced much progress since its launch five years ago. In fact, it has decreased from the initial surge. Sundance, both Institute and Festival, purport to be about diversity, and as such, initiatives are put in place to appease said need.

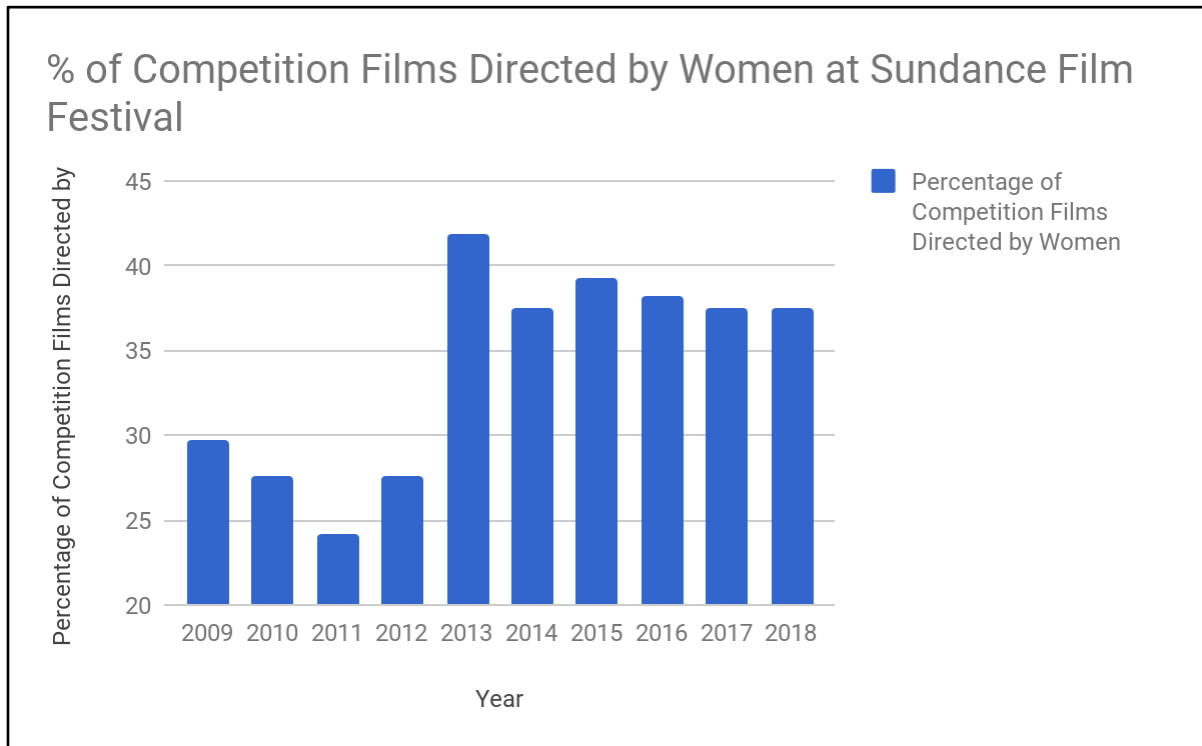


Figure 1. The percentage of films in competition that were directed by women at the Sundance Film Festival, 2009-2018. This is based on information compiled from press releases announcing the competition lineups from the respective years, and is drawn from the U.S. Dramatic, U.S. Documentary, World Cinema Dramatic, and World Cinema Documentary listings.

However, the drive to continual progress, toward a lasting, equal representation of minorities and women, becomes a fading voice in the noise of Sundance's programming and image. Here again, we can turn to Redford to see the contradictions inherent to Sundance's autonomous and heteronomous drives. Redford, as I have shown, has a history in his work of marginalizing women's roles and characters, which supports patriarchy and masculine myths of power. Furthermore, while as a producer he has supported female directors, as an actor he has yet to work with a female director and lend his literal visibility to such a project. While diversity is important in how Sundance presents itself, it does not bear out too successfully in its actual management. In this, we see a reflection of both Redford's contradictions, and American dominant ideology—that is, the patriarchy that the nation promotes in the mythos of figures such



as Roosevelt and Thoreau, while still attempting to consider itself as progressive, the next step in the political evolution of the world.

Redford, in imbuing his auteur capital upon Sundance, brings his own specific form of authenticity, one that purports to be about diversity while still trafficking in white male privilege and authority, that puts forward an image of egalitarian innovation, while still longing for the patriarchal past. In his role as habitus to the Sundance Film Festival, Redford's norms and values, which in turn reflect the dominant ideology as seen in Western expansionism and wilderness fantasy of the 19th century, become part of the fabric of the Festival's identity, evident in how it presents itself from its marketing and landscape, to its initiatives and its programming. Before I reach my conclusion, then, I want to give a closer look to some of Sundance's programming, briefly examining two key films in the Festival's history: Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992).

### **James Spader and Mr. Pink Walk Into a Ski Chalet...**

In 1989, Steven Soderbergh's debut feature film, *sex, lies, and videotape*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. According to Lory Smith, the film was the talk of the town that year (193). Todd McCarthy says much of the same in his *Variety* recap that year (22), and the film would go on to win the Festival's audience award, in addition to winning the Palme d'Or at Cannes and grossing \$24.7 million dollars at the U.S. box office (*Box Office Mojo*).

Soderbergh's film was the first massive hit of the festival, marking a real turning point in its success. The film details the criss-crossing relationships between four people: Graham (James Spader), who is revealed to have a sexual fetish in which he records women talking about their sexuality and sometimes masturbating; Ann (Andie MacDowell), who is locked in an unhappy marriage; John (Peter Gallagher), her husband who is having an affair and Graham's college friend; and Cynthia (Laura San Giacomo), Ann's sister, who is sleeping with John. The film is a strange hybrid of slow-paced drama and sex comedy. For our purposes, then, in looking closely at the film, what does it say about the Sundance ethos and identity?

In "The Confessing Animal in *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*," Alice Templeton draws an immediate connection between the film and the notion of confession, specifically in relation to power and Foucault. Templeton argues that Foucault's thoughts on the exchange of power in confession give understanding to the appearance of contradictions in Soderbergh's film, that is,

between its exploitation of sexual pleasure and its exploration of sexual ethics (15). Foucault, as I have noted, describes how in a confessing relationship, the person confessing falls under the power and constraint of the one taking the confession. Foucault sees the confession as a ritual which ultimately transfigures the person confessing: “it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation” (62). The confession also becomes a way for the person taking the confession to have power over the person confessing, to both discuss the person’s sexuality, and take pleasure in and own it at the same time. Templeton sees Soderbergh’s film as being fundamentally about this compelled drive to confess, as seen in Graham’s taped confessions from women. “As the viewer watches the character make and watch their videos,” Templeton writes, “the camera within the camera ... replicates and comments on its own confessional distancing. Yet the film’s self-reflexivity is not so intrusive as to disrupt our involvement with the characters or the plot” (16). In this sense, Soderbergh’s film gets to take part in a two-track conversation, trundling along well-trod narrative and aesthetic terrain while also exacting confessions from itself (16). This contradiction is in addition to the character of Graham, who is at once heroic and manipulative (16). Graham is a figure who embodies two paths of masculinity, the hero who disrupts the suburban malaise of Ann’s life and marriage, and the one who controls women under his gaze. While Templeton may think this works under a Foucaultian scheme of confession and power, the film does appear to have trouble holding its elements in tension. The ending feels somewhat deflated, a strange magical cure. Meanwhile, there is an oddly traditional judgment at hand towards John and Cynthia, who are sexually unrepressed, but run rampantly in their moral disregard.

Sally Robinson, in her essay “‘What Guy Will Do That?’ Recodings of Masculinity in *sex, lies, and videotape*,” is ultimately critical of the film’s contradictions. Robinson argues that the film attempts initially to reconfigure masculinity, one that is not identified strictly in opposition to femininity and homosexuality (143). This is exemplified when Ann confronts Graham about his video habit, which Graham staunchly defends as being not an act of debauchery, a “perversion,” but simply a different mode of masculine sexuality (Robinson 160). However, Robinson is ultimately dissatisfied by the film’s ending, which sees Graham, who has, until this point, been impotent, suddenly cured. These contradictions, especially in regards to a masculinity that both points at subversion while indulging in tradition, are reflective of the Redfordian ethos at Sundance. As demonstrated in Redford’s work, as well as his biographical

details, Redford's cultural capital is held within a persona that is complex in how it approaches its American masculinity. Here, in Soderbergh's film, we see two main strands which reflect the Redfordian habitus at work: a truth-and-power confessionality, and a subversive-traditional masculinity. Both themes—or rather, beliefs or values—are held in tension within the Redfordian habitus, and are reflected at Sundance. When *sex, lies, and videotape* premiered at Sundance, it reinforced Redford's habitus for the Festival, embodying artistically all that Sundance—and Redford—was about. *sex, lies, and videotape* reveled in the kinds of contradictions inherent to Sundance, Redford, and America as a whole. In premiering at the Festival, the film was able to capitalize on the always already ideology of Sundance, as derived from Redford.

Three years after Soderbergh's film blew up the U.S. Film Festival, another film made waves at the newly titled Sundance Film Festival: Quentin Tarantino's feature directorial debut, *Reservoir Dogs*. Starring Tim Roth, Harvey Keitel, Steve Buscemi, and others, the film is told in a fractured timeline which lends a puzzle-quality to the story of a heist and undercover operation gone horribly wrong. Psychoanalytic theorists Donald R. Ross and Marcus Favero posit that Tarantino's films, including *Reservoir Dogs*, share unique characteristics with "the inner world of the borderline personality" (490). Ross and Favero cite the discontinuity of the film's editing which they liken to concepts of dissociation, a common trait of borderline personality. Tarantino's film, as I have mentioned, was not particularly successful in its Sundance debut. While it drew great attention, it also reportedly drew ire, and did not win any awards in the Festival's competition. In addition to what has already been noted, what does this say about Sundance? What kind of film is *Reservoir Dogs* to be accepted by the festival, but so publicly unwelcome by its awarding bodies?<sup>25</sup>

In answering these questions, it is helpful to see how Tarantino's film both engages with the Sundance ethos and sets itself apart at the same time. For example, Stephen Weinberger, in "It's Not Easy Being Pink: Tarantino's Ultimate Professional," looks at *Reservoir Dogs* through the lens of professionalism and what it means ethically and relationally to be professional. He

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<sup>25</sup> Granted, every year there are films that are well-reviewed and do not get awards at Sundance. *Reservoir Dogs* is different because it is highlighted in Callan's biography of Redford (363), and therefore is part of Redford's star-image, in terms of how Redford wishes to be seen.

finds in Mr. Pink an exemplary of professionalism, the only character who, in taking part in the heist,

remains in control of himself, analyzing each situation clearly and rationally; all of the others ultimately allow their private values to control their actions. While the other robbers have begun to relate to one another on an emotional and personal level, only Pink insists on the original agreement of anonymity and distance. (49)

Here, then, we might see the opposition to the Redford-habitus that Sundance plays in, with a principal character refusing to take part in the kind of confessionality Redford—and Sundance, therefore—traffics in. However, as Weinberger believes, Mr. Pink is also unlikeable, the only hold out as one-by-one, the other characters reveal their true names, effectively confessing their deepest selves to their fellow criminals (50). In this sense, then, Tarantino’s film holds some of the same characterization technique to Redford, with the transgressive figure being unlikeable and shown to not fit the necessary societal mold. It begins to make sense, then, as to why the film was accepted into the Redford-branded festival. However, while Weinberger may deem Mr. Pink unlikeable, I argue alternatively that he is also funny, and, as played by Buscemi, quite compelling. On behalf of the spectator, this can produce a feeling of attachment to Mr. Pink, which goes against how Redford’s persona, and therefore Sundance, sees the world and its ethics. While there may be some moral underpinnings compatible to the Sundance brand, it is all shot up by the film’s aesthetics and commitment to what one might call the wrong kind of nostalgia.

In “‘Let’s Get Into Character’: Role-Playing in Quentin Tarantino’s Postmodern Sandbox,” film scholar Joshua Wucher argues that Tarantino views cinema’s role as “to present a fantastical, theatrical, and visceral form of art” (1288). For Wucher, Tarantino’s films revel in nostalgia, but not for the warm-hearted, Norman Rockwell illustrations of Redford’s films, but rather the slap-dash violence of Tarantino’s preferred genres (1288). Tarantino takes these genres and chops them up, creating a discontinuity and disruption that hovers over the entire film and distances the viewer. In Todd McCarthy’s Sundance review of the film in 1992, the critic deems the film “nihilistic but not resonantly so” (52). I argue that this is reflective of the distancing, but also of what Wucher is describing. While McCarthy might believe the film means nothing outside its story and characters, the film is participating in a historical dialogue between film texts, but, again, not the kind of texts that the Redfordian habitus would favour.

In this regard, then, while Tarantino might indulge in nostalgia for a specific time period, he was ultimately not a good fit for the Sundance—that is, Redford—brand. While Redford might attempt to call this an issue of how the public perceives Sundance, it is ultimately more an issue of how Redford himself is perceived. As the habitus to Sundance's field, Redford's norms and values become narrative parameters, to a degree, guidelines and mouldings to aid in reproducing the Sundance mode of cinema. Redford's capital does not mesh, narratively or philosophically, with the Tarantino brand. While Bourdieu's notion of habitus can shift, as affected by its field as the field is by it, Tarantino is a social agent with norms and beliefs of his own, carried in by his own habitus, and unaffected by the Redfordian brand and habitus that Sundance fosters and promulgates.

### **What is the Sundance Film Festival?**

The Sundance Film Festival is a nest of contradictions, of public independence and private commercial dealings, of cinephiliac screenings and massive Hollywood parties. It is a Festival that witnesses a march for women even while its programs devoted to female filmmakers stagnate and stall. Much as in Bourdieu's artistic fields, it is a site for both autonomous and heteronomous principles as they counter and support one another. All of this, as I have shown, is evident in the widely available materials that aid in constructing the Sundance identity. In the academic literature, as well as the more popular literature on the Festival, we see an event that survives as a contact zone between autonomous and heteronomous cultures. It is evident even in the Festival's own literature, its communication materials, programming, and even the land and geography in which it finds itself. Sundance champions authenticity, and then sells it. It screens films in the American wilderness, and then packages the experience. It survives and is known by this dichotomy, the image of artistic, American purity overlaying a handshake deal worth millions.

## Conclusion

In 1980, at the end of that fateful weekend when Redford and his friends planned the initial stages of the Sundance Institute, those attending got together for a group photo. After the photographer's shutter clicked, Redford reportedly reached out and received an eagle that he had allegedly nursed back to health himself (Biskind 13). In the woods of Utah, hidden away amongst mountains and wildlife, Redford stood to welcome this symbol of everything American. It was a surreal moment that served to embody the mythical vision of authenticity that hovers over the entire Sundance empire, and one that reinforces the ties between authenticity, wilderness, and masculinity that lie at the heart of Redford's own Americana. It was mythmaking at its finest: Redford, through Sundance, is nursing American cinema back to health. How is he doing this then? This thesis, using Redford's relationship to the Sundance Film Festival as its primary example, has argued that filmmakers, in particular those with pre-existent clout or capital, can have an impact on the public prestige and understanding of a film festival. In understanding the filmmaker, I have argued, we can understand the festival.

In the first chapter, I provided an overview of how scholars have approached film festivals, as well as stardom and auteurism. Breaking down some of the work of scholars such as Skadi Loist, Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, Liz Czach, and Marijke de Valck, I laid out an understanding of filmmakers as stars of film festivals, and, furthermore, stars and auteurs as branding devices. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theories of field, capital, and habitus, I argued that filmmakers, by being publicly attached to a film festival over a long period of time, can act as habituses to film festivals. Upon being imbued with capital and prestige from other film festivals, awards, and other social agents, filmmakers can engage with a film festival and influence how its behaviours, values, identity, and norms are understood in the broader public sphere. As I phrased it, the filmmaker brings his unique auteur capital—that is, the prestige and unique qualities attached to his persona as a filmmaker—to bear on the film festival. How the filmmaker or star's identity—or image, as Richard Dyer would say—is constructed then affects the practices of the Festival, or, at the very least, how those practices can be comprehended.

In the second chapter, I started my case study of Robert Redford and the Sundance Film Festival with a star study of the former. Before getting to Redford's own image, I first analyzed how authenticity, wilderness, and masculinity—which would all be imperative to the

construction of Redford's image—have developed through history, in particular as they pertain to the United States. As my research showed, authenticity developed in time in America to a Romantic vision of wilderness, itself a fundamental trait of the American ethos. This, in turn, reinforced patriarchal gender roles, where men run for the hills in order to escape perceived urban feminizing forces, and women are set in specific categories and behaviours. This analysis then led to looking at how Redford's own persona and image are constructed. Studying his biography, I argued that Redford's image is built around a series of contradictions that ultimately support this patriarchal wilderness Romance. Whether it is the Thoreau epigraphs, or the connections to Steinbeck, Redford's biography ties the actor-director to a specific vision of American masculinity, one that is both taciturn and open, old-fashioned and risky. Here, then, we see the contradictions that Dyer points to as supporting the broader contradictions at the heart of the dominant ideology. It was evident in Thoreau and Roosevelt's era, and it is here rebirthed in Redford. This was then further made clear by an analysis of Redford's film as both an actor and director. From *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* to *The Horse Whisperer*, each of the studied films presented a performer and/or director replete with paradoxes and yet uniform at the same time. He was patriarchal, yet progressive, traditional, yet innovative. Redford's persona carries with its capital a list of norms, values, ideals, and beliefs, all of which he brings to the Sundance Film Festival.

In the third chapter, I examined the Festival, as well as the public image that both surrounds Sundance and that Sundance communicates itself. Beginning with a study of the academic literature on Sundance, a list of contradictions, ones that mirror Redford's own, became quickly evident. This duality between the autonomous and heteronomous sides of Sundance was then echoed in popular literature on the Festival, which gave a more sensationalised but altogether effective construction of the Sundance image. In addition to scholarship and journalism, I analyzed what Sundance itself was communicating, in its promotional materials, its programming, and even its landscape. Sundance sets itself apart from Hollywood in the pure hills of Utah, something it encourages in its marketing. It supports regional filmmakers from across the United States and world, thereby publicly fostering the autonomous side of the artistic conversation. Yet, it also freely engages in the other, heteronomous side of the conversation, those market discussions that give both the festival and its filmmakers economic capital. In this chapter, the connections between Redford's autonomous

American neoliberalism and Sundance's became more clearly marked, and the full force of Redford's role as habitus was evident in Sundance's own identity and practices.

In Biskind's book, describing the appearance of "Ordinary Bob" at the initial Sundance Institute meeting, he writes, "in fact, it was all a bit much, teetering on the edge of kitsch, an Eddie Bauer theme park, Bobworld ... Still, Redford had charisma and passion to spare, and they created a powerful gravitational field" (12). Over his decades-long career, there has been plenty of gossip about Redford, but at the core of him is a barrel of contradictions as his persona weaves between the ordinary and the extraordinary. This alternating persona, as I have argued, is in keeping with Bourdieu's ideas, and is reflected in the autonomous-heteronomous principles of the Sundance Film Festival, Redford's professional home-away-from-home. Sundance too is both ordinary and extraordinary, a community of cinephiles hidden in the natural mountains, as well as a network of executives and privilege staying at an upscale resort. Ordinary Bob has never truly existed, and nor has the purely independent Sundance Film Festival. The latter—a field unto itself, with a variety of social agents, from Soderbergh to Tarantino, director John Cooper to former employee Lory Smith, interacting upon its stage—has always functioned within the realms of its habitus, Robert Redford.

The Sundance Film Festival is the authenticity-minded, self-reflexive, confessional filmmaker wanting to reveal truth through his art while being swarmed by a gaggle of Hollywood agents and executives as he indulges in hegemonic narratives. It is the extension of an arts colony, thriving in a corporate, institutional context. Like Redford, it acts according to Bourdieu's principles of an artistic field, "whose very functioning is defined by a 'refusal' of the 'commercial'" ("Field of Cultural Production" 75), and whose ultimate economic success hinges on the image of this authentic disavowal.

Returning to the first chapter, Sundance becomes a clear example of the kind of business festivals that Skadi Loist and Mark Peranson discuss, the kind of industry node that Dina Jordanova and Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong are interested in. Yet, what makes Sundance, and certain other festivals especially interesting is its desire to appear otherwise, to both indulge in the commercial benefits and practices of the business festival, while also projecting the image of a community-oriented audience festival. However, as I have already noted, these are two sides of



the same ideological coin, all of them balancing the autonomy and heteronomy, artistry and economics of a Bourdieusian cultural field. In regards to Sundance, we simply see both sides of the coin simultaneously. It is a magic trick told on a massive stage, and, in this case, the one publicly wielding the wand and wryly saying, “Abracadabra,” is the flaxen-haired matinee idol Robert Redford, whose own form of auteur capital shines new light on the Festival. In his close public relationship, Redford—prestigious, Oscar-winning actor and filmmaker—acts as the habitus to Sundance, influencing and shaping its field into what it is today, marking it with his contradictions and paradoxes, as well as his autonomous and heteronomous tendencies, all of which are themselves borne in and reinforce the oppositional forces of a larger American narrative of authenticity, masculinity, and the wild, wild west.

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## Filmography

*All the President's Men*. Directed by Alan J. Pakula, performances by Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman, Warner Bros, 1976.

*Barefoot in the Park*. Directed by Gene Saks, performances by Robert Redford and Jane Fonda, Paramount, 1967.

*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Directed by George Roy Hill, performances by Paul Newman and Robert Redford, Twentieth Century Fox, 1969.

*Downhill Racer*. Directed by Michael Ritchie, performances by Robert Redford and Gene Hackman, Paramount, 1969.

*Horse Whisperer, The*. Directed by Robert Redford, performances by Robert Redford and Kristin Scott Thomas, Touchstone, 1998.

*Jeremiah Johnson*. Directed by Sydney Pollack, performances by Robert Redford and others, Warner Bros. 1972.

*Ordinary People*. Directed by Robert Redford, performances by Donald Sutherland, Mary Tyler Moore, Timothy Hutton, and Judd Hirsch, Paramount, 1980.

*River Runs Through It, A*. Directed by Robert Redford, performances by Craig Sheffer and Brad Pitt, Columbia, 1992.

*sex, lies, and videotape*. Directed by Steven Soderbergh, performances by James Spader, Andie MacDowell, Peter Gallagher, and Laura San Giacomo, Outlaw Productions, 1989.

*Reservoir Dogs*. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, performances by Tim Roth, Harvey Keitel, Steve Buscemi, and Michael Madsen, Dog Eat Dog Productions, 1992.

*Tell Them Willie Boy is Here*. Directed by Abraham Polonsky, performances by Robert Redford and Katharine Ross, Universal Pictures, 1969.

*This Property is Condemned*. Directed by Sydney Pollack, performances by Natalie Wood and Robert Redford, Paramount, 1966.