Writing about films: contribution profiles and critique practices

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ABSTRACT:

Based on an automated textual analysis of 40,000 film reviews posted by 18,000 French contributors on a web-based platform providing information on cinema, this article examines the relationship between the profiles of contributors (number of reviews posted, length of time of subscription to the site) and the type of reviews posted (choice of films, date of publication, models of argumentation, modes of ratings). The study identifies two strongly contrasting reviewing models (film-centered and reception-centered) and shows that the regularity of practice significantly influences reviews, with regard to both form and content. The more often an author posts reviews, the closer the critique will be to the norms and formats of a professional critique. This finding challenges the idea that online amateur critique can undermine the hierarchies of evaluation of cultural goods.

KEYWORDS:

Online participation, cultural evaluation, film reviews, amateur critique, professional critique

INTRODUCTION

Amateur critique of cultural goods, already strongly present on blogs, has been thriving with the proliferation of Web 2.0 platforms designed to publish comments and opinions. Little is known about the different populations of contributors. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explored their motivations and showed a degree of ambivalence between the quest for personal gratification and that of social prestige and symbolic power. The study of Pinch and Kessler (2011) on the top reviewers of Amazon also shows that these amateur critics are highly concerned about maintaining their rank in the classifications organized by the websites. Intense contributors are usually men who have a high level of education: this is the case of Wikipedia administrators (Baytiyeh and Pfaffman, 2009) or influential bloggers on cinema and culinary topics (Dupuy-Salle, 2014; Naulin, 2014). The rise in the website hierarchy is thus based on social and cultural selection. But those researches on the elite contributors provide only a partial and distorted view from the top and we lack in-depth research considering the population of amateur critics as a whole. This article is intended to bridge that gap in the literature by proposing a situated empirical analysis of one world of amateur critique from the inside, as it unfolds on a particular website. We constituted a corpus of 40,000 texts by amateur critics, posted in 2011 by 18,000 different contributors, on a platform devoted to cinema in France.

There are some risks in treating amateur critics as a coherent set, as opposed to the world of professional critics, without analyzing the way in which this world is structured. Since the late 1990s, various authors have highlighted the fact that online participation has a particular way of functioning. A small number of contributors participate a lot, and sometimes for a long time, as opposed to a very large number who participate only occasionally or even only once (Adamic and Huberman, 2001 and 2002; Shirky, 2003). This power law of participation seems to be a constant which has been observed on both forums and discussion lists, and on all Web 2.0 sites. While many studies report the same finding, few draw any conclusions on the phenomenon. Akrich (2012), in a study of discussion lists, rightly emphasizes the fact that it is difficult to talk about a community with regard to groups presenting such unequal participation. She raises the question of the "dominant speakers" who, in her sample of lists, account for 11-18% of the participants, but produce 54-73% of the messages. On websites, all judgments are equal, *a priori*, but actually the opinions of those who contribute the most weigh heavily in the evaluations overall (see Mellet et al., 2014). This imbalance is exacerbated by special consideration granted to the most productive contributors especially when readers have deemed their contributions to be of interest, which makes them more visible in the display order on many websites. Otterbacher (2011), who studied the most and least prominently displayed reviews on several websites, shows that the authors of the former usually belong to the "elite" officialized by the websites, when such classifications exist.

Inequality of participation also has an impact on the content produced. In a study of interaction on a forum devoted to cinema, in the early 2000s, Allard (2000) showed wide variations in the ways that critics talked about films, depending on how long and how intensively they have been participating in the forum. MacAuley and Leskovec (2013), in a survey on opinions posted online by beer lovers, note that the types of comments and the choices of the products commented on evolve with the evaluation practice.

There is not a unified world of amateurs all sharing the same point of view, but rather a cluster of sub-groups aiming for different objectives through the same exercise. Our first hypothesis will be that within the same socio-technical platform, the way of reviewing films can differ widely, depending on the individual.

Amateur critique and the transformation of cultural evaluation

The development of amateur critique raises many questions on the underpinnings of cultural evaluation and on transformations of the critical practice. In the case of cinema, of interest to us here, there was a shift from a few dozen articles on a film, to several thousand reviews, and from known authors to an anonymous mass. This is a considerable change and not only of scale, even if, as Verboord (2010) has shown, online lay critique appears more as a complementary device than as a replacement for information about books, and does not fundamentally undermine the hierarchical systems of value attribution or the authority of expert critics.

Michèle Lamont (2012: 205) sees evaluation as a social and cultural process that demands "(a) inter-subjective agreement/disagreement on a matrix or a set of referents against which the entity (a good, a reputation, an artistic achievement, etc.) is compared, (b) negotiation about proper criteria and about who is a legitimate judge and (c) establishing value in a relational (or indexical) process involving distinguishing and comparing entities".

We can easily see how professional critique can partially meet these objectives. It is based on a number of shared conventions (Becker, 1982) and on quality standards and stable scales of legitimacy. Janssen (1997), in the case of literary critique, and Allen and Lincoln (2004) in that of film, have described professional critics as "reputation entrepreneurs" between whom there exists a sound consensus on the works and artists who warrant their attention, and on which they agree. There is a form of mutual control between critics that only the super star critics can defy. By contrast, it seems unlikely that the thousands of unacquainted amateur authors have a common reference framework and use the same quality evaluation criteria. The phenomena at play are therefore more a matter of collective evaluation dynamics, in the tradition of a pragmatic approach. Here, the principles of evaluation are built during the evaluation process itself, with a collective elaboration of relevant criteria. Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) pointed this out: the definition of worth is an object of tension, risk and uncertainty that demands constant adjustment of agreement.

We can contrast amateurs and professionals by their approach to works, starting from the distinction that Bourdieu made between *aesthetic disposition*, where the work is appropriated "in its form rather than in its function", and *popular aesthetics*, which "implies the subordination of form to function" (Bourdieu 1979: 33). In other words, a distinction

between an approach based on the aesthetic qualities of the good – characteristic of professional critique – and one based on the emotional feeling experienced by a consumer of that good – which could be typical of amateur critique. Several authors have recently called Bourdieu's distinction into question and shown that, with the growth of omnivorous cultural repertoires, we are witnessing a pluralization of expert assessments and a transformation of the discourse of professional critique (Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Kersten and Bielby, 2012; Bielby and Bielby, 2004; Baumann, 2007; Van Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010). But the work of Verboord (2014) seems to indicate that aesthetic disposition is still strongly attached to expert discourse in traditional media. He compared 624 film critiques collected on two platforms devoted to cinema, to study their specific characteristics in relation to the type of medium in which the review was published: dedicated platforms, blogs, webzines, and the press. Verboord found that judgments based on non-artistic criteria decrease as one moves up the institutional hierarchy of the media publishing them, and are far less present in critiques in traditional media. His research nevertheless raises the question of the possible development of the ideological framing of popular aesthetics in cultural judgments. Our approach has several points in common with that of Verboord. We study film reviews posted on a dedicated platform, starting with the text content of the critiques themselves, and then identify specific forms and formulations of the critic's arguments. We analyze the profile of the critic by the number of reviews already written, as did Verboord, but we add a second indicator, the duration of the amateur critic's membership on the website, as a measure of long-term investment in critical activity. But our research question is different: we want to examine how the writing of particular types of reviews is related to the reviewers' status and make the hypothesis that there is a link between the reviewing profile of contributors and the type of critique produced.

Methods

How did we explore these two hypotheses (wide differences in the way of reviewing films; writing of reviews is related to reviewing profile of critics)? First we identified two ways of writing about films and evaluated the factors that most strongly influenced the form of critique. We then focused on the critics themselves. We showed how the length of time a critic has been a subscriber to the website and the intensity of his practice define significantly different ways of producing reviews.

To carry out these analyses, we had to develop a process for extracting and structuring the data. Our analysis is based on the exploitation of data on a French internet-based platform providing information on cinema, which we will refer to here as Viv@films. This website, which functions similarly to IMDB, receives between 20,000 and 30,000 reviews per month. It provides information about films (directors, genres, actors, summaries, trailers, etc.), professional and amateur reviews and ratings, and also data on amateur reviewers themselves. Some of them are part of *The Club*. *The Club,* which has some 500 members, half of them film bloggers, was created by the website in 2008. It is not the volume of the contribution or the number of "useful" votes that affords access to *The Club*, as is the case for Amazon's top reviewers: members are selected by the site professionals on the basis of

rather opaque criteria, such as the quality of their texts, or their knowledge of certain film genres (Author, 2014).

On this platform we delimited a corpus of films (those released in 2011 and still showing at the end of the year) from which we extracted: all the characteristics of each film, all the amateur and press reviews, and all available information on the critics themselves. Out of a corpus of 140 films, we extracted 40,000 amateur reviews and 2,300 press reviews.

A relational database structure was set up to maintain the links between the entities, so that it would always be clear which film a review was on and who the author was, along with their characteristics. This enabled us to articulate the content analysis of reviews with the characteristics of their authors and of the films concerned.

In this section, after defining all the films that constituted our starting point for the construction of the review corpus, we present the inductive method that we used for clustering the textual content of reviews. We then describe the way in which we extracted the data from the website and structured it for statistical processing.

Defining a corpus of films

The corpus consists of all the films released in 2011 and still showing at the end of that year. The initial idea was to have all the films released in 2011, but when the data was collected those no longer showing were no longer accessible with the search engine. The data are therefore truncated on the left. They are also truncated on the right, as they were extracted at the end of December 2011, after which new reviews were written. The distribution curve of reviews according to release date (Figure 1) shows on our truncated sample that 83% of the reviews were published before the end of the first month following the release. We also notice that 11% of the reviews were published before the official release. The content analysis of these reviews shows, on the one hand, those who saw the film as a preview or festival screening, and who actually mentioned that privilege, and on the other hand those who signaled their wish to see the film. This is very common for some commercial films, especially series or books adapted to the cinema. For example: "I can't wait to see this film… I just love this saga!!!!", with regard to *Twilight, Chapter 4*.

Truncation on the left (by the removal of films) and on the right (by the exclusion of late reviews) are limits of the initial sample.

Figure 1. Date of critique posting by reference to film release date
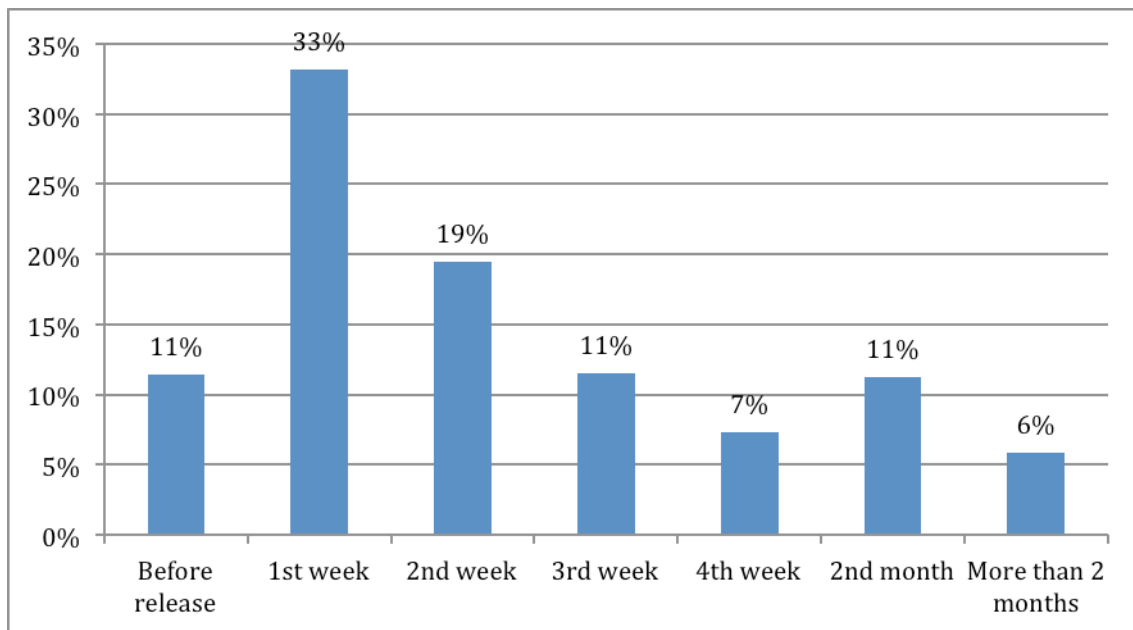
The distribution of the number of reviews per film (Figure 2) shows a wide dispersion in the critics' activity, with very few films that receive many reviews and a large number that receive few. Compared to amateurs, professional critics take care to globally cover the entirety of the production.

Figure 2. Distribution of reviews by film (amateurs and press)
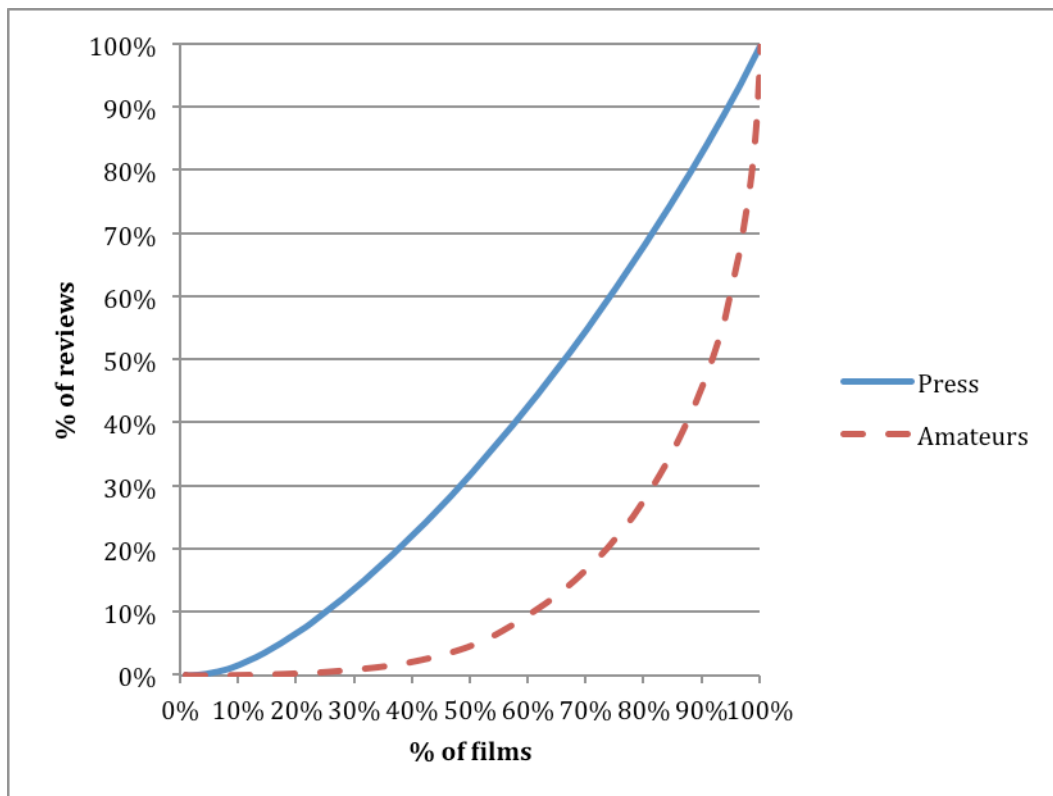
Reading: 60% of 2011 films received 10% of amateur reviews but 45% of press reviews.

Review content analysis

For a systematic grasp of the content of the reviews, we used an inductive textual analysis. A clustering algorithm was used to split a set of documents into subsets or clusters, based on co-occurrences of the words used. Reviews using the same type of vocabulary were grouped together. We used the algorithm designed by Reinert in his software Alceste, which has been reproduced in a new software, Iramuteq. On a matrix, which crosses reviews and lemmatized words, Alceste carries out a descending hierarchical classification which is particularly suited to sparse matrices (with over 90% "0's"). The idea is to take all of the reviews and to divide them into two groups, in such a way as the groups will be as homogenous as possible in terms of the vocabulary used, while also being as distant as possible from each other. The procedure is then reiterated on the larger remaining group until the requested number of classes has been obtained. This classification process is iterative and leads to a typology. Technically, the descending hierarchical classification uses factorial analysis. Once the first axis is calculated, a hyperplan is placed along the axis to split the cloud into two sub-clouds until it maximizes the inertia between both while minimizing the intra-class inertia (Reinert, 1983). This defines the first two groups, and the process is reiterated.

We will now describe the composition of the matrix (input of the algorithm) with its lines and columns.

What sample of reviews will constitute the lines of the matrix? The corpus of reviews was characterized by mechanisms typical of contributions on internet: very few individuals who contribute significantly and the vast majority who contribute very little (exponential distribution). Additionally, we find snowball effects and concentration of attention, which cause wide disparities in the number of reviews per film (5,000 for *Intouchables*, whereas a quarter of the films received fewer than 20). Since the text mining methods start with the whole corpus to identify categories, we had to take samples to reduce the effects of this power law distribution. We chose to retain at the most the first 400 reviews produced from the date of the film's release: a corpus of 17,280 reviews (a little under one half of all our reviews).

What words did we use as variables in the analysis? The quality of the analysis depends on the selection and reduction of the size of the vocabulary used. We first lemmatized the corpus to reduce the plurals to the singular, and the conjugated forms of the verbs to the infinitive. A morpho-syntactic analysis then distinguished the parts of speech and retained as active variables only those words that belonged to categories: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. To ensure that films did not influence the clustering too much, the names of the films, the actors and the directors were not active in the analysis. Words with a low frequency were also eliminated.

Finally, at the intersection of a line and a column, a "0" indicates that the word does not appear in the review, and a "1" indicates that it does. The algorithm can then be applied to the matrix prepared in this way.

Extraction and enhancement of data presented on the website at several levels

Our approach was the following. Starting with each of the films, various data were extracted from the platform: characteristics of the film, press reviews, spectators' reviews, and available characteristics of the authors of the reviews.

The characteristics of the film included the title, the director(s), the main actors, the film's nationality, the genre, and the release date. The genre was attributed by Viv@films and comprised one to three values. Films were also characterized by synthetic indicators related to the amateur and press reviews: number of amateur ratings and reviews, average rating (on a scale of one to five), number of amateur reviewers for each rating (number of stars), number of press reviews, and average rating. We did not however extract data concerning awards, budgets and box-office figures which, at the time, were not systematically available on the platform. A table was filled with all of these descriptive features of the films.

Another table was created for amateur reviews, containing the review itself with the associated rating, the film in question, the author of the review, and the date and time of publication of the review.

Likewise, a table was compiled containing press reviews (usually a short citation extracted from the article selected), ratings (attributed by the website to the review), the name of the media and that of the journalist.

Finally, another table provided available information on the authors of amateur reviews: their date of signing up to the website, the number of reviews written since then, their membership of the Club. As the information was limited, we were unfortunately not able to use the data on gender and age. This is of course the main limit of this type of approach based on the activity and contents visible on the platforms, without being able to trace them back to the individuals' characteristics and motivations.

Based on these data drawn from the platform, we built variables and complementary indicators to enhance the description, without any external knowledge of the film.

For the films, we modified the typology of genres proposed by Viv@Films (from one to three genres per film) to attribute only one genre to each film and to reduce the number of categories to the following: Documentary, Drama, Dramatic Comedy, Comedy, Action-Thriller-SciFi, and Animation. We gave priority to the first genre given by the platform, eliminated genres characterizing the public ("family") and replaced rare genres ("Biopic", "War", etc.) by a more common genre. We also built an indicator of preference for films, which enabled us to interpret the differences between amateur and press ratings. We divided the films into three categories: films that were clearly preferred by amateur critics (difference of rating > 0.7), films that were clearly preferred by the press (difference of rating < 0.3), and the others. The first and second categories each contain a quarter of the films. A variable enabled us to distribute the films across four groups of equivalent size, according to the number of ratings received: from 0 to 58, from 59 to 441, from 442 to 1,254, and over

1,255 (those numbers define the frontiers between quartiles). These new variables were added to the first ones.

For the authors of reviews, complementary indicators were established: the duration of the amateur critic's membership to the website (less than 3 months, 3 months to a year and a half, a year and a half to 4 years, over 4 years), the number of reviews written since the person's subscription to the website (1, 2 to 12, 13 to 50, over 50 reviews), the number of reviews written on films released in 2011 (1 or 2, 3 to 10, over 10 reviews). Because of the exponential distribution of the practices, we have opted for grouping by category.

This provided us with the distribution of the number of contributors and the number of reviews, in relation to the regularity of writing critiques. Ten percent of the contributors of film reviews in 2011 had already written over 50 reviews since they had signed up on the platform, and had produced over a third of the contributions. Those who had written only one review accounted for a third of all contributors but only 15% of the reviews (Table 1).

If we look only at the reviews of films in 2011, the disparities are greater: 69% of the contributors had written only one review, and 3% more than 11 reviews, which corresponds to 24% of the corpus.
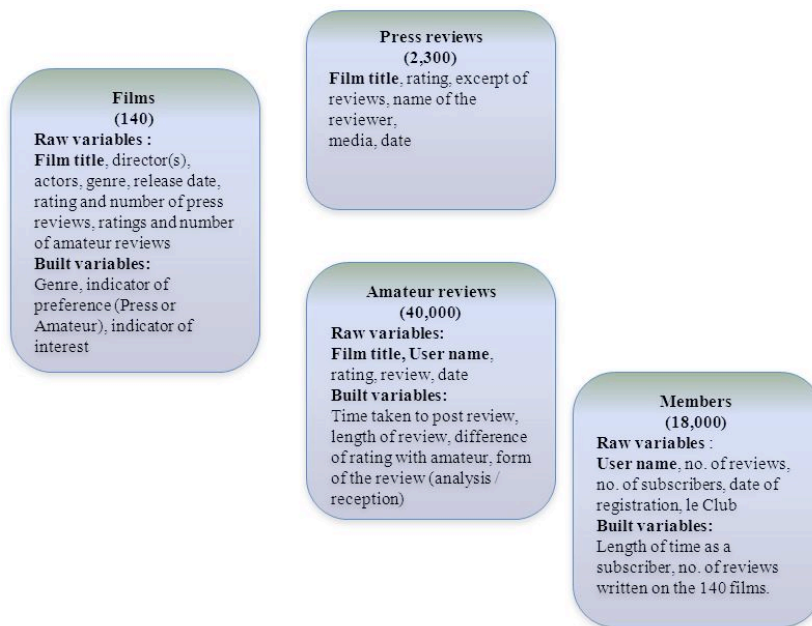
For the reviews themselves, apart from the clustering of the content presented in the preceding section, we built some additional indicators such as the interval between the film's release and the posting of the review (before the release, during the first 4 weeks, in the 2nd month, later than that); the length of the review, in number of words, organized in 4 quartiles, from the shortest to the longest (from 0 to 25 words, 26 to 45, 46 to 92, 93 to 900).

Table 1. Distribution of contributors and critics by the number of reviews written since signing up on the platform

Since signing up	Nb of contributors	% of contributors	Nb of reviews	% of reviews
1 review	5857	32%	5857	15%
2 to 12 reviews	7829	43%	12392	31%
13 to 50 reviews	2711	15%	7904	20%
> 50 reviews	1780	10%	13321	34%
Total	18177	100%	39474	100%

Once the reviews had been clustered and the various data had been extracted and structured as variables (Figure 3), the statistical treatment could be applied: logistic regression and statistical tests.

Figure 3. Structure of collected and enhanced data

Films (140)
Raw variables :
Film title, director(s), actors, genre, release date, rating and number of press reviews, ratings and number of amateur reviews
Built variables:
Genre, indicator of preference (Press or Amateur), indicator of interest

Press reviews (2,300)
Film title, rating, excerpt of reviews, name of the reviewer, media, date

Amateur reviews (40,000)
Raw variables:
Film title, User name, rating, review, date
Built variables:
Time taken to post review, length of review, difference of rating with amateur, form of the review (analysis / reception)

Members (18,000)
Raw variables :
User name, no. of reviews, no. of subscribers, date of registration, le Club
Built variables:
Length of time as a subscriber, no. of reviews written on the 140 films.

Results

Two models of reviewing

The analysis of the textual content of the reviews in our corpus shows two strongly contrasting models with, on the one hand, film-centered reviews (about the content and form of the film) and, on the other, reception-centered review (about the effect that the film had on the viewer). We have decided to keep a partition of the reviews into two classes. Further partitions would contrast positive and negative critiques, which could be highly relevant in an opinion mining approach, but that was not the aim of our research.

These two models are very similar to those identified by a series of studies on the content of online amateur reviews (Allard, 2000; Legallois and Poudat, 2008; Verboord, 2014). The terminology varies from one author to the next, but they all adopt the opposition identified by Bourdieu, between *aesthetic disposition* and *popular aesthetics* (Bourdieu, 1979: 33).

Film-centered reviews that correspond to the "aesthetic disposition" category, tend to be long reviews with particularly rich vocabulary (the rate of *hapax legomena* – words that occur only once – is 38%). Reception-centered reviews, which correspond to "popular aesthetics", tend to be short reviews that have comparatively poor vocabulary (the *hapax* rate is 24%).

The type of vocabulary used also differs distinctly in these two review models. Film-centered reviews focus on the content of the film (*life, man, woman, love, world*) and on its creation (*author, director, shot, filming, light, genre,* etc.). We find technical vocabulary specifically related to film production, and the names of films and directors are often quoted. These

types of reviews regularly refer to film contests and competitions (*awards, selection in festivals*). In reception-centered reviews, terms referring to emotions and to the viewer's feelings are over-represented (*disappoint, adore, laugh, nice, bad*, etc.), as is a set of terms relating to recommendation (*go to see, recommend, advise, advise against*). The difference between the trailer and the film is often discussed. In view of the role of recommendation in this second category, pronouns in the first and second person ('I' and 'you') are prevalent. By contrast, reviews in the first category use an impersonal style, closer to highbrow reviews, in which attention is paid to the form, the content, and the medium.

For a concrete example, here are two reviews that typify this opposition, for the film Drive:

"I rarely leave the movies going whaaaoooo. For me, this is THE film of the year. The inner strength of Ryan Grosling, the production, the soundtrack… It's a 'don't miss'."

"Nothing new: ultra polished aesthetics, bits of music from the '80s, contemporary violence (makes one think of Korean films or De Palma), a hero from nowhere and who doesn't have much to say (oh so original) who's too smooth and good-looking to look the part of a scary hooligan. If it wasn't for the superb production, this otherwise beautiful movie (thanks to the DOP), would be singularly lacking punch, despite some masterful moments; it doesn't meet up to what most South-Korean films today offer: a build-up and especially more originality. The Pusher and Vallahla Rising trilogy is still way ahead."

As   the   following   graph   shows   (

Figure 4), there is a very close correspondence between the writing style and the genre of the films concerned. Whereas 48% of reviews on average are film-centered, this rate is 70% for dramas and dramatic comedies, and 87% for documentaries. Conversely, over 60% of the reviews of animation films, comedies and action films are reception-centered.

Figure 4. Distribution of types of critique by film genre
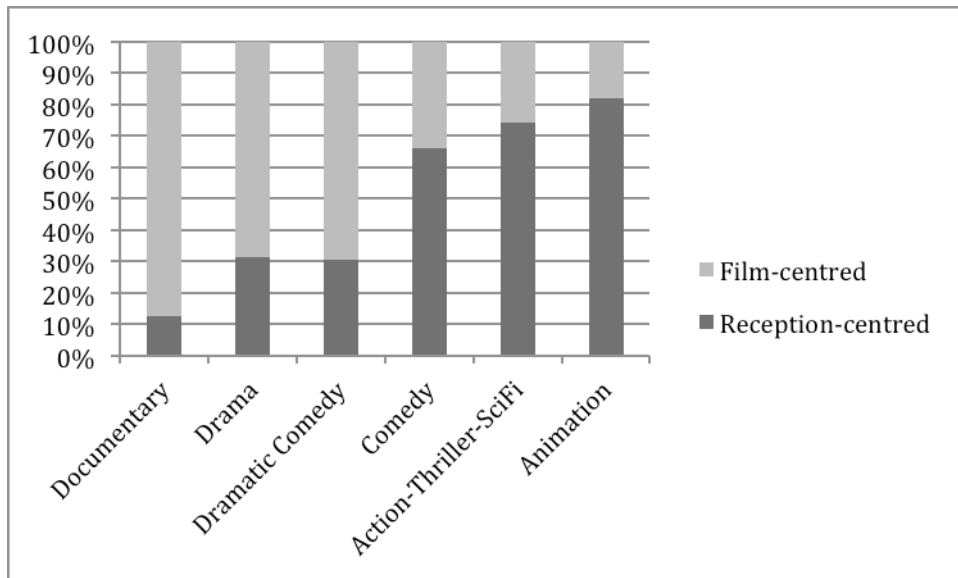
Reading: For documentaries, more than 90% of critiques are analytical and focus on the content and form, while for animation films, 80% of critiques are reception-centered (emotion and recommendation).
Chi-square : 3043, P<0.0001

Now that these two writing styles have been distinguished and characterized, which factors have the most influence on writing a critique focused on the film rather than on reception?

We classified the 17,480 critiques by text mining analysis, and carried out a logistic regression estimating the likelihood of writing film-centered critiques. There are three types of explanatory variables: variables related to the film (genre, difference of rating between professionals and amateurs), variables related to the author of the critique (time since first subscribing to the website, number of critiques published on films from 2011, membership of the Club), variables related to the critique itself (timing of reviewing, length of the review).

Initially we used continuous variables: the number of critiques written, the duration of the amateur critic's subscription to the website, and the length of the critique. These three variables had a positive influence, i.e. the higher the number of critiques, the greater the chances were of having a film-centered critique. Yet, by building categorical variables, we identified more precise effects, especially thresholds.

In the end, all of the variables were categorical and binary, which enabled us to compare the coefficients. For each variable, a reference situation was established (recent subscription to the website, only one critique written, very short critique, comedy). For each variable, we chose the modality of reference that was the most closely correlated with reception-centered critiques (Table 2).

Table 2. Logistic regression, model H0: Film-centered reviews

	Parameter	Label	Estimate	Pr > ChiSq	Point estimate
	Intercept	Intercept: Crit_Film=0	-2.6552	<.0001	
Reviewers	Number of reviews written on 2011 films	3-5 reviews	0.1217	0.0274	1.13
	ref : 1 review	6-10 reviews	0.2881	<.0001	1.33
		More than 10 reviews	0.6384	<.0001	1.89
	Experience	3 months-1.5 year	0.3187	<.0001	1.38
	ref : less than 3 months	1.5 to 4 years	0.3343	<.0001	1.4
		More than 4 years	0.5918	<.0001	1.81
	Club	Member of the Club	0.7302	<.0001	2.08
Reviews	Timing of reviewing	First week	-0.0163	0.6865	- 0.98
	ref : 2nd-3rd week	2nd month	0.2748	0.0011	1.32
		More than 2 months	0.4653	<.0001	1.59
	Nb or words	[26-45]	0.3462	<.0001	1.41
	ref : less than 25 words	[46-92]	0.955	<.0001	2.6
		> 92	2.125	<.0001	8.37
Films	Genre ref : Comedy	Documentary	3.0309	<.0001	20.7
		Drama	1.631	<.0001	5.11
		Dramatic comedy	1.6522	<.0001	5.22
		Action-Thriller-SciFi	0.2495	<.0001	1.28
		Animation	-0.3823	0.0001	- 0.68
	rating Am vs Pro	Am << Pro	0.7678	<.0001	2.16
	ref : median	Am >>Pro	-0.5838	<.0001	0.56

The genre of the film is the variable with the strongest influence on writing film-centered critiques. All things being equal, a critique is nineteen times more likely to be focused on the

film when the latter is a documentary, than when it is a comedy (reference situation), and five times more when it is a drama or comedy-drama. The opposite is true for animated films. Given

Figure 4, we had this intuition.

The critiques are more likely to be film-centered when the films being reviewed received substantially higher ratings from the press than from amateurs.

The longer the critique, the more likely it is to be film-centered, especially when the critique is very long (over 92 words). It is as if emotional expression and the effort of making a recommendation could not be sustained and were therefore reserved for short critiques. Time also favors film-centered critiques: from the second month and beyond, reviews focus more and more on analysis.

Finally, the membership to the Club, subscription to the website for at least four years, and having written over eleven reviews on films made in 2011, all affect the focus of the critiques. The longer the subscription or membership and the greater the volume, the more likely reviews are to focus on the film content.

Here we adopted the point of view of the reviews, and have shown that the writing style of a critique depends on the characteristics of the film, primarily the genre, as well as the regularity and duration of the practice. Now we will look at the contributors.

Novices, regulars and elites

We ranked our population according to the regularity of their reviewing practice, the number of reviews posted about 2011 films, which is related to the length of time the person had been subscribed to the site and we isolated members of the Club (Table 3).

Table 3. Characteristics of reviews by contributors' profiles

Contributor's profile	Reviewers	Reviews	Reviews published before film release or first week of release
Only one review on the platform	5,857 (32%)	5,857 (15%)	41%
1 or 2 reviews on 2011 films	9,139 (50%)	11,580 (29%)	34%
3 to 10 reviews on 2011 films	2,665 (15%)	12,201 (31%)	33%
More than 10 reviews on 2011 films	425 (2%)	8,531 (22%)	39%
The Club	91 (0.5%)	1,305 (3%)	53%

Novices (with only one review since signing up) accounted for a third of all contributors in 2011. 47% had been subscribed to the website for less than three months (against 22% for all the contributors). Contributors who were new to the site or one-time-only contributors have

a very particular way of reviewing films. Their ratings are more generous, with a median of 4.5 (out of 5). They can also be distinguished by their ability to give very low ratings: 22% of ratings below 1.5, against a median of 15%. They prefer comedies and action films, and avoid dramas. The reviews are short, with a median of 30 words, and are characterized by the expression of feelings and recommendations to others: over 70% of the reviews revolve around reception and recommendation. There is no analysis of the film and no reference to the world of cinema, but there is an impulsive sharing of emotion. In these occasional reviews, the pleasure experienced during the film and the desire to share seem to be the main motivation for the contribution – which may explain such high ratings. These critics write reviews not to be part of the cinephile world, but to encourage others to see the film.

On the other hand the *regulars*, that is, those who have published over 11 reviews about 2011 films, who account for 2% of our contributors, and who have written 22% of the reviews, have a very different writing style. Their ratings are lower and they avoid the lowest and highest ratings. Their reviews are also longer: on average twice as long as those of novices. They usually critique dramas, rather than comedies and action films. Over 60% of the reviews revolve around film analysis and avoid subjective opinions and recommendations. 68% of these contributors have been subscribed to the site for over a year and a half, against a mean of 43%, and 35% have been subscribed for over four years, against a mean of 19%. The regularity of their practice is related to the duration of their subscription to the website.

 Between these two extreme types of participation lies a continuum: the more a critic writes reviews, the lower their ratings and the longer their reviews will tend to be; they will also address the aesthetics of the film and not personal impressions as a member of the audience, and they will show comparatively little interest in comedies and action films.

At the top of the ladder of contributors we find a very small elite group with particular characteristics: the members of the *Club*. In terms of numbers they are a tiny proportion of the amateur critics (91 out of 18,000 in our corpus in 2011) and are not necessarily the biggest contributors. Of the 17 Internet users that produced the highest number of reviews of our films, only five were members of the *Club*.

This elite group is distinctly different from the regulars and warrants closer attention. Even though the members of the Club are not the biggest contributors on the scale of a year (but are nevertheless large contributors in view of the duration that they have been subscribed to the website), they are a very particular type of critic, especially compared to the regulars who are accustomed to producing a large number of reviews. First, 45% of them (against 36% of the regulars) put their reviews online within the same week that the film is released, and far more of them publish reviews before the release – thus attesting to their privileges (presence at previews and press viewings). Their reviews are also on average twice as long as those of regulars, and close to the format of press reviews. The members of the Club have strong similarities with the regulars and they share preferences for certain genres. They prefer dramas and comedy-dramas (47% of their reviews against 35% for the others) rather than comedies (16% against 25%). Compared to press critiques, they share a point in common with all the contributors: the noteworthy taste for action films, thrillers and science fiction. 26% of their critiques are on this type of film, against only 14% of those of professionals

(Table 4). This is one of the distinctive features of amateur critique: the marked taste for genres that professional critics tend to have turned away from.

Table 4. Genres of films reviewed, by contributor's profile

	Only one review	1 or 2 reviews	3 to 10 reviews	More than 10 reviews	The Club	Total	Press Critics
Documentary	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	10%
Drama	22%	21%	24%	32%	32%	25%	38%
Comedy-drama	7%	8%	11%	14%	15%	10%	13%
Comedy	31%	27%	24%	20%	16%	25%	16%
Animation	10%	12%	11%	9%	8%	11%	9%
Action-Thriller-SciFi	30%	32%	29%	24%	26%	29%	14%
Total	5,857	11,580	12,201	8,531	1,305		2,324

Chi-Square: 1074.84; p <0.0001 (Press Critics excluded).

84% of their reviews (against 62% of those of regulars) focus on the film and avoid an expression of emotion, the presence of an I/you marking interaction with the public, and anything that verges anywhere near promotion and recommendation. Finally, they seldom give a film the maximum rating of 5.

There are thus radical differences in the practice of amateur critics (Table 5, Table 4 and Figure 5). Regulars have a profile that differs significantly from that of novices, and even if it is close to that of members of the Club, it does not have all the same properties.

Table 5. Rating and length of reviews by contributor's profiles

|	Rating		Review's length (number of words)	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Only one review on the platform	3.6	4.5	52	30
1 or 2 reviews on 2011' films	3.6	4	64	39
3 to 10 reviews on 2011' films	3.5	4	75	45

More than 10 reviews on 2011' films	3.3	3.5	108	67
The Club	3.0	3	170	133

Ratings by contributor's profile: statistically significant difference in ratings depending on the contributor's profile (analysis of variance: F: 92.4 - p-value: <0.0001).
Length of review by contributor's profile: statistically significant difference in ratings depending on the contributor's profiles (analysis of variance: F: 347.6- p-value: <0.0001).

While the rating of a film, the length of the review and the timeframe in which the review is published vary significantly, depending on the amateur critic's degree of practice, the most noteworthy difference appears in the way the review is written. The proportion of "analysis" reviews, focused on the film, increases with the regularity of practice (Figure 5). Contributors who become regulars avoid reviews centered on reception, and show evidence of the acquisition of codes and norms characterizing the professional world (moderate ratings, preference for drama and comedy-drama, critiques of a length close to that of press critiques). In their research on professional literary reviews, Janssen (1997) and Van Rees (1987) have found very similar phenomena to those observed among the most productive and recognized amateur critics: long reviews; alignment with the choice of books and aesthetic criteria of those colleagues with the best reputation; competition for positions of authority, etc. Janssen pointed out that "a critic's recognition as a connoiseur depends to a great extent on the similarity or comparability of his choices and statements to those made by colleagues" (Janssen, 1997: 295). The same applies to the most productive amateurs studied here. It is as if, by reading the other amateur critics, new entrants on the platform who are ready to invest in it and want to get involved in the community of film reviewers, learn the cultural codes of the community of practice. Explicit and implicit references to preceding reviews show that the authors read one another's reviews. A shared know-how is built, closely related to the regularity of the practice. The only exceptions are those who episodically come to share their emotion and recommend a film, without investing in the group."

Figure 5. Distribution of the two types of critique by contributor's profile
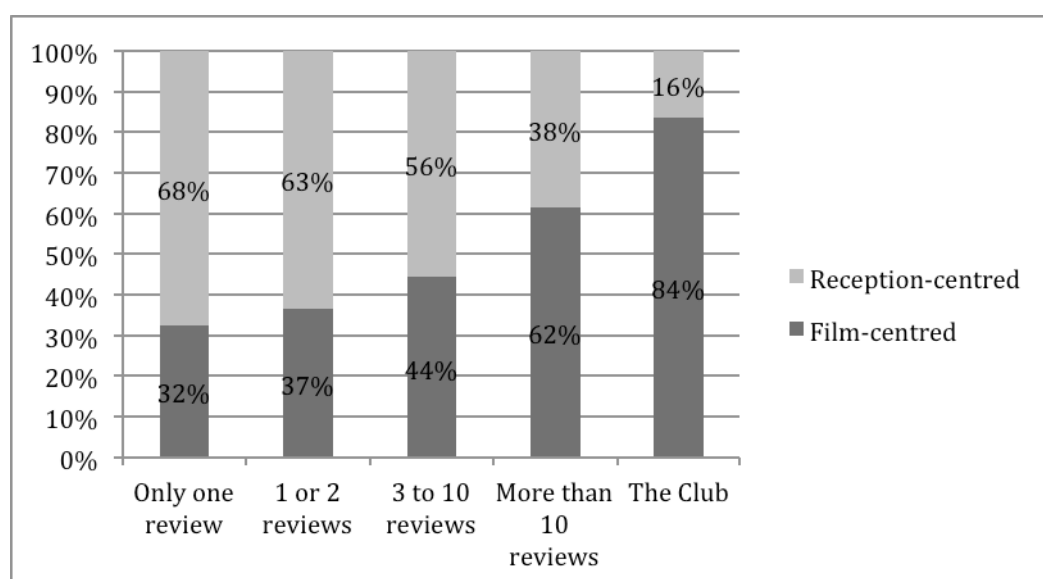
Chi-square =1245, P<0.0001

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the structuring of a world of amateur film critics and their production. It has shown that different amateurs have very different ways of taking up the devices offered by the same platform. The models and motivations for a critics' work vary widely. While some may write to express their enthusiasm in a single sentence, others may produce long analyses of the film.

We have shown that this heterogeneity of the amateur critic world is governed by a strong correlation between the profiles of actual practices, and the texts produced. As the intensity of a critic's practice increases, measured by the length of time he or she has been a subscriber of the website, and the number of reviews he or she has published on it, the texts evolve towards a model close to that of professional reviews. This applies to the choice of films, the date of publication, and the type of review: length, mode of evaluation, etc. The results of this research indicate that the "peer produced reviews" category should therefore be used with caution, and that this population should not be presented as uniform.

This study is also one of many that have examined changes in cultural evaluation with the rise of popular aesthetic criteria that emphasize emotional and experiential styles of evaluation (Bourdieu, 1979; Bielby and Bielby, 2004, Van Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010). Verboord (2014) has shown that this type of discourse is to be found in online peer-produced reviews, in particular. Our research confirms this presence, in amateur film critics, of a user-oriented approach to reviewing, but it tends to tone down its significance. Critics who take their personal experience of the film as a category of aesthetic judgment are also those who are

the least involved in the reviewing exercise and the least present on the website, over time. The most regular contributors are also those who play the largest role in the collective of authors, due to their permanence and productivity. As Otterbacher (2011) has shown, their critiques are likely to be more visible on the site and to receive more attention from most of the audiences. Our work therefore tends to weaken the hypothesis of a change of the criteria of cultural evaluation with the increase of amateur reviewing performed in the name of popular aesthetics. This amateur reviewing is expressed on dedicated online spaces, but those who actually practice it have a subordinate role in the world of reviewers. Popular aesthetics is indeed a form of critique but has not yet been able to impose itself as a model to follow.

This study does of course have limits. It focuses on a particular cultural form, cinema, for which there are widely diverse modes of appropriation due to the variety of the offer. It would be interesting in future research to compare the evaluation process between different types of cultural goods. The study is also based on the analysis of only one French website that organizes the conditions for posting critiques and the relationships between authors in a specific way. At the time of the survey this site had not chosen to make visible the relative success of reviews among visitors, for example by a useful vote function. Also, although it does publish a large volume of film reviews, it is not representative of other loci of online interaction on cinema, such as forums. Future research should find out what is framed by the different socio-technical devices. Finally, above all, this research was carried out without access to the social identities of the amateur critics, and it is very likely that what is related here to their contribution profiles is also correlated with other socio-demographic variables, such as level of qualifications, age or gender. Further research should seek to analyze the population of contributors, with particular attention to the least active contributors, who as of yet have never been studied.

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