

Understanding the Demotic Film Critic

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Abstract
This paper is concerned with a subsection of film critic on YouTube, referred to within this thesis as a film reviewer. Across two years, this thesis details an investigation into film reviewers analyzing the content of four YouTube channels. The purpose of this is to understand how film reviewers contribute to film culture by creating a demotic pathway into it for the layman. Within the investigation, the four YouTubers chosen all had over 100,000 subscribers and all conformed to a set of standardized norms that define them as film reviewers. During the investigation, these channels had the entirety of their video libraries examined so as to discern initially the form of film reviewing. As well as qualitatively reading the videos, the language was studied quantitively through utilizing of a language reading service to prove that film reviewers do speak in a more understandable way than other kinds of film critic. The investigation then progressed onwards to understanding how the method of film reviewing has the potential to impact its audience. Film reviewing is a primarily demotic practice that opens up conversations for layperson cinemagoers. The analysis demonstrated that reviewers are able to engage viewers in discourse around cinema through multiple tactics. Finally, this paper aims begin research around film reviewers, with the aim that they be investigated in further depth.

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How do YouTube film reviewers contribute to film culture?
Understanding the demotic shift

Introduction

This thesis studies film reviewers on YouTube and seeks to investigate how film reviewers contribute to film culture, focusing on how they create a discursive space for demotic film discourse and act as a gateway to greater film culture. Despite the term "reviewer" being used interchangeably with "critic", both in academia and the press, for the purposes of this thesis "film reviewer" will also be applied to content creators on YouTube (www.youtube.com) that provide a service of recommending whether or not viewers should see films. Film reviewers release videos specifically about contemporary movies in which they advise their personal audiences on how said audiences might respond to the films in question, making them a subsection of film critics. Within this thesis a film critic is defined as a professional who engages in discourse around a film with the intention of giving a recommendation towards the reader/audience of whether or not they should spend money to see the film. Julia Lesage defined it as 'a specific kind of writing… that of a consumer's guide' (1974: 12). Film critics are gatekeepers of film, meaning that they attempt to control which films the public sees by making recommendations.

By contrast, whilst film reviewers are a subsection of film critic, reviewers' videos follow the function of giving recommendations but are specifically conversational in tone and are shot with the reviewer speaking directly to the camera. This particular style is referred to as a vlog style – referring to a video blog on YouTube primarily comprised of a still shot of the reviewer with an

improvisational tone. This vlog style and conversational mode of address demonstrates a non-confrontational style that encourages the viewer to relax without feeling challenged by the relative amateurs on screen speaking without authority. This makes this style of review accessible to anyone who specifically wishes to gauge whether a film is deserving of financial investment instead of an insight into a film. Film reviewers demonstrate a lack of desire to control the viewer's opinion as they often assume the viewer has already watched the film. So whilst they can be seen as a subsection of film critic, they are more tastemakers than gatekeepers. Bourdieu (1984) defines cultural gatekeepers and mediators as those involved in the mediation between the production of cultural goods and the production of consumer tastes. Cultural mediators play an important part in the cultural industries, scouting and selecting creative talents (Caves 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2012) whereas reviewers do not do this, instead acting as tastemakers to suggest which films are going to appeal to different levels of film viewing and to converse with the general audience.

The central argument of this thesis is that film reviewers on YouTube create a demotic pathway into film discourse. Within this thesis film reviewers are viewed as a demotic alternative to traditional forms of film criticism. By using 'demotic' I invoke the connotations around Graeme Turner's notion of a demotic turn – an increase in opportunities for 'ordinary people' to be featured within the media (2009). When the term demotic is used in this thesis, it refers explicitly to "ordinary" people and their increasingly visible perspective. Therefore, this thesis explores film reviewers and views them as evidence of a growing discourse about film that is relatively colloquial and casual when compared to

conventionally more formal film critique. The emergence of self-titled film reviewers on YouTube is emblematic of a shift in discourse from the domination of professional experts in film criticism to a shared existence alongside the amateur non-expert film reviewers. Edward McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara J Phillips describe this phenomenon (specifically in reference to bloggers) as 'the megaphone effect' (2013). The megaphone effect occurs when 'ordinary consumers, defined as individuals lacking professional experience and not holding an institutional or family position, post to the web about consumption and acquire a mass audience for these posts' (McQuarrie et al 2013: 137). Film reviewers are film tastemakers who have acquired a mass audience through demotic tastemaking providing another potential pathway for any viewer to access film culture.

This thesis invokes the idea of a demotic shift in film discourse not only because of the debates within film studies but also the general responses in the press towards film reviewers. In a possible response to the paradigmatic shift that the internet and social media have induced, the online press often questions whether there is disconnect between audiences and traditional film critics. In 2007 the trade publication Variety opened a thread on its website where subscribers, critics, and staff members gave their answers to the question: 'Are film critics really needed anymore?' The second commenter on the article explains 'I think critics write for other critics'. This comment addresses the commonly held belief that critics are a specific kind of audience, one that does not represent the viewpoint of the imagined mass audience. Film reviewers are more accessible for a variety of reasons explored within this thesis, including the

way that they present themselves as similar to the viewers rather than more knowledgeable. This allows them to present films that they believe are likely to be popular but ultimately allow the viewer to decide for themselves, or simply allow the audience to converse with the reviewer. Additionally, as explored in Chapter Three, film reviewers are easier to understand than more traditional (the meaning of which is expanded on in Chapter Two) or more academic critics in terms of readability.

In some cases there is a quantifiable divide in online audience opinions and online critical opinions - the critical opinions being voiced online by those who hold the title of film critic (which usually has a separate section on sites like Rotten Tomatoes) and the audience opinions being voiced by anyone else. The disparity between audience and critic Rotten Tomatoes (www.rottentomatoes.com) scores demonstrates that general audiences (or at least those who use Rotten Tomatoes) tend to be more positive towards movies than the critical audience. According to statistics published on statistics website Stephenfollows[1], critics tend to give a wider spread of ratings than audiences. Half of all films receive an aggregate audience rating between 47% and 76% fresh compared to the 28% and 73% fresh by critics on Rotten Tomatoes. This means that audiences tend to rate movies more positively and have a narrower spread of ratings than the critics. Clearly there is a difference in how the critical audience evaluates films and this brings the purpose of a film critic into question. A film critic's fundamental function is to recommend, but if their opinion is not

[1] The statistics are written and updated by the eponymous Stephen who, according to his website, holds numerous qualifications and experiences relevant to film statistics.

accepted as reflective of the general public then their usefulness is oft-debated by the press. As is explained within this thesis, film reviewers fulfill the function of film tastemaker using a demotic voice, therefore circumventing the problem of not being reflective of general opinion.

However, there are many sources in the press that criticize the emergence of the megaphone effect. For example, film critic Armond White offers an understanding of the function of film critics, arguing that they are meant 'to help us understand the state of movies, our cultural life, and our general moral and political being'. He pessimistically argues that 'our culture is moving further and faster away from intelligence, individuality, morality and literacy'. To White, 'Internet criticism has, instead, unleashed a torrent of deceptive knowledge-a form of idiot savantry usually based in the unquantifiable "love of movies" (thus corrupting the French academic's notion of *cinephilia*)'. He states that 'all opinions are not equal; the opinion most worth disseminating is the informed opinion, based on experience and learning' (2010). White's comments demonstrate that within the contemporary period there is debate as to who should be allowed to discuss films, with individuals like White arguing that the individuals having the ability to integrate into film culture in a non-intellectual way is negative. Within academia, Mark Dery concurs somewhat with White's notions, writing that a consequence of the proliferation of amateur discourse is that now we live in 'a world unmediated by authorities and experts' and deems the roles of critics now redundant because they have become interchangeable with readers (2018). However, Graeme Turner offers the argument that 'the lack of a professional journalism credential or editorial control is actually presented

as a positive – a sign of independence' (2009: 72). This badge of independence explains some of the appeal of reviewers, they are able to present themselves as unlabored by experience and therefore their opinion is more relatable to the general public.

In addition to the mixed response towards film criticism in the press, within academia, there is repeated focus on the demise of film criticism. In *The Death of the Critic,* Ronan McDonald argues that criticism has become devalued due to the diminished status of critics within the public sphere. However, this kind of critical doom-saying is nothing new; in 1984 Terry Eagleton diagnosed elite arts criticism as being in crisis and argued that 'the traditional authority of criticism has been called into question' (103) demonstrating that similar narratives around criticism are not novel. This brings me to my reasons for researching film reviewers. Instead of viewing them as merely an opposing style of film criticism, this thesis considers film reviewers as a potential gateway to wider film culture. Film reviewers are a currently undefined and inherently nebulous subsection of YouTubers growing in popularity. YouTube and other forms of media allow for a potential co-existence of film reviewers and other forms of film critics. Whilst there has been significant research into film criticism, the cultural contributions of film reviewers are an unexplored facet of the cultural industries. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the question; what are the cultural contributions of film reviewers on YouTube? I use this chapter to lay out the chapters of this thesis, clarifying the structure of my argument.

Chapter Layout

Chapter One explores the academic literature around YouTube, fandom, and taste to provide a framework in which to situate my research. In this chapter I argue that film reviewers must be viewed as YouTubers who are fans of cinema, fans who view film through a consumerist lens, making recommendations to other consumers. To be a writer of reviews is to be a specific kind of audience, and therefore this thesis deals with the contributions made by this one kind of taste public (meaning people who share similar values and standards), represented as their own cultural agent. This introductory chapter briefly defines terms essential for working within this field of film and cultural studies before moving on to examine the approach and model used. Additionally, I will outline the literature used in creating the framework for studying film reviewers applied here. Throughout this thesis four film reviewers are used as primary examples, Jeremy Jahns, Chris Stuckmann, The Flick Pick, and Andre 'The Black Nerd'. Each of these reviewers exist on YouTube with over 100,000 subscribers

Chapter Two outlines a brief history of film criticism and of YouTube itself. Beginning with film criticism I outline a working definition of film criticism for both the chapter and the thesis, expanding on the concept I outlined in this chapter. I argue that both film reviewers and film reviewer's use of persuasive writing is key to understanding them. Furthermore, the conception of YouTube and its appeal - according to its users – is discussed within this chapter. I then examine in slightly more depth what is meant by vlogging and what connotations that has.

Chapter Three defines film reviewers in depth and explores their form. Initially examining how film reviewers have diverged from what in Chapter Two I define as 'traditional film criticism', this chapter moves to discuss all aspects of film reviewers. It examines them as members of YouTube, as film fans, and, most importantly, in terms of how they create an authentic image of themselves as part of their persuasion tactics. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to determine precisely what film reviewers are and how they work within a participatory culture to review films. Henry Jenkins (2016) defines *participatory culture* as a culture which 'embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices' (2016: 2). Moreover, Jenkins (1992) coined the term 'participatory culture' as a means of describing the 'cultural production and social interactions of fan communities' (Jenkins et al 2013: 2)'. However, the concept has evolved and now refers to a range of groups producing and distributing media. Jenkins et al note that 'various scholars have linked considerations of fandom into a broader discourse about participation in and through media' (Jenkins et al 2013: 2), which is my intention in this thesis. I have utilized Jenkins' admittedly broad definitions and seek to specify that participatory culture also refers to a culture of interaction. This is because participation itself must include interaction between persons participating. Additionally, I argue that using these broad definitions is necessary considering the magnitude of connotations that the word *culture* is ascribed.

Chapter Four details the cultural contributions made by film reviewers. Using these contributions I explain how film reviewers represent a demotic shift in film criticism. Specifically, film reviewers create a demotic pathway that allows for the layperson to easily integrate into wider film culture. I have chosen to approach this chapter utilizing four specific case studies. The four aforementioned film reviewers were chosen because the central conceit of this thesis relies on the popularity of the reviewers being representative of a general audience's taste. Therefore, the four reviewers chosen all have over 100,000 subscribers.

Finally, I should briefly address my interest in film reviewing to explain my perspective in this thesis. Cornel Sandvoss (2005) and John Tulloch (2000) have both argued that there are questions in relation to academics not having first hand understanding of the fandom that they are researching. Therefore, in the interests of being transparent: I have been interested in video criticism since my first viewing of *Atop The Fourth Wall*, a comic book specific review show, which led me on to discover *Nostalgia Critic* - a series initially hosted on the website That Guy With the Glasses and now located on the site Channel Awesome. Both series helped popularize the initial format of reviewing online before it expanded to incorporate the film reviewers on YouTube that I investigate. It is also worth noting that of the particular reviewers investigated within this thesis, I have been subscribed to Jeremy Jahns and Chris Stuckmann each since 2012 meaning that, speaking anecdotally, I have been eased into wider film culture partially by film reviewers. In terms of why my research is important I agree with Fiske's views on vertical intertextuality (1994: 117-124) – meaning that our

understanding of a primary text (in this case film) is influenced by our readings of the secondary texts (criticism). Additionally, Paul Rixon (2011) in his book *TV Critics and Popular Culture* argues that television critics incorporate tertiary texts in the form of public discussions and gossip into their criticism meaning that the critic has linked primary, secondary, and tertiary texts together. The same case can be made for why it is important to understand film reviewers. As will be argued throughout this thesis, they may not incorporate the language or film theory that film critics traditionally employ. Therefore, studying film reviewers allows for an understanding of the insight they provide their audience, they approach film from a specific depoliticized perspective that often decontextualizes films and presents them as visceral entertainment only. Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington state that 'studying fandom allows us to negotiate our social, political and cultural realities and identities' (2008:10) and ideally this research is no different, providing further insight into the mindset of the lay film reviewer.

Chapter 1: Framework and Literature Review

This chapter identifies key literature that informs my research and constructs a framework through which I have studied film reviewers on YouTube. This research is specifically concerned with investigating how film reviewers contribute to film culture by creating a demotic pathway. Film reviewers, much like film critics can be approached from a variety of angles. Within this thesis film reviewers are approached as fans of cinema who are influenced by YouTube's form and its participatory culture. Additionally, reviewers are theorized in this thesis as consumers effectively taking on the task of recommending films to other consumers, the meaning of which is explored further in this chapter.

YouTube

The debates around YouTube and fandom heavily inform my definition of film reviewers. Research on participatory culture and the presentation of the self are of particular interest to my argument. Both of these debates are prominent within fan studies. In their book *YouTube*, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green argue that 'For YouTube, participatory culture is not a gimmick or a sideshow, it is absolutely core business' (2013: 6). They posit the question of whether 'from an audience point of view, is it a platform that provides access to culture or a platform that enables consumers to participate as producers?' (2013: 14). I argue that the platform of YouTube enables participation but it is the producers, referred to as YouTubers, who encourage usage of the gateway into the culture. Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as a space where 'fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of

new content' (2006: 290). Participatory culture is not meritocratic. Therefore, when discussing participatory culture, it must be emphasized that general participation is useful to making money on YouTube. Creators who encourage more participation have the potential to become better known on the site but not necessarily for any reasons related to quality or expertise. When discussing participatory culture Burgess and Green argue that YouTube is a site of disruption 'because it unsettles the producer-consumer divide', concurring with Potts et al (2008). I accept this argument around YouTube as it conflates producers and consumers meaning that I interpret film reviewers with the understanding that, because of the participatory culture facilitated by YouTube, film reviewers are both producers and consumers. This feeds into my understanding of film reviewers as a hybrid form of consumer giving advice to other consumers, a critical consumer.

Furthermore, the means by which YouTubers, and therefore film reviewers, encourage participation becomes obvious when understanding the form of vlogging prevalent on YouTube. When writing about vlogging, Burgess and Green argue that 'Videoblogging or 'vlogging' is a dominant form of user-created content' (2013: 94), it is 'technically easy to produce, generally requiring little more than a webcam and basic editing skills' but additionally, 'it is a form whose persistent direct address to the viewer inherently invites feedback' (2013: 95). In a pseudo interactive manner film reviewers are not literally speaking to the viewer but performing answers and replies to them, therefore encouraging interaction with them and potentially participation. Videos that are based

around comments are explored later on in this feedback, the dialogue between film reviewer and viewer becoming a conversation within film culture.

In addition to exerting a level of control over their media, the presentation of the self is important when discussing any YouTube content that incorporates a narrator(s) speaking in front of the camera. The image presented is an agreed upon falsification of the producer, as discussed by Kathrin Peter and Andrea Seier in *The YouTube Reader* (2009), concurring with Gunn Enli's work on mediated authenticity (2015). Within this thesis, it is the mediated identities of film reviewers that are studied. Since this dissertation's focus is on film reviewers on YouTube, it must be recognized not only how they present themselves but how they use the space in their videos to aid this representation. Often the simplicity of a bedroom wall is seen in YouTube videos as spoken about by Peter and Seier who write about what is literally presented to the audience and how because of YouTube's origins in video sharing by individuals who don't have high tech equipment, or who don't have the cultural capital of filmmaking, Using Michel Foucault's terms, Peter and Seier define the bedroom as a heterotopia. Bedrooms are 'private and public', 'real and utopia', performative *and* transgressive spaces' (2009: 199). The invocation of the heterotopic space is a fundamental aspect of YouTubers that informs my viewpoints when analyzing film reviewer's form in Chapter -Three.

Moreover, in *Watching YouTube*, Michael Strangelove writes about how 'as in the case of punk rock, a segment of the audience is drawn towards the raw and more genuine quality of video diaries' (Strangelove 2011: 65). Strangelove

argues that vlogging can be viewed as an authentic, rebellious alternative to television; I extend this claim arguing that, by association, film reviewers can be appealing as a defiant alternative to traditional film criticism. As Jenkins notes when discussing the declining appeal of television in *Convergence Culture*, younger viewers 'expect greater influence over the media they consume' (2006b: 244) and YouTube as a platform allows for greater control through the ability to directly feedback to the content creator.

Film reviewers on YouTube distinguish themselves from prior professions with a similar gatekeeping function by taking advantage of the flattened social structure created by YouTube in order to function as tastemakers. Danah Boyd discusses this reduction of communicative barriers in social networks and their flattened social structures and is of particular relevance (2007). By "flattened social structure" I mean that theoretically there is a reduced social status across YouTube that would impede communication. This is a useful way of understanding the relationship between the audience and YouTube film reviewers. When not producing videos, reviewers still comment on YouTube videos and participate with the online community. Additionally, I argue that this flattening of social structures and reduction of barriers to communication signals movement toward a particular kind of participatory culture, in which 'the public not as simply consumers of pre-constructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined' (Jenkins et al 2013: 2). Jenkins' model of participatory culture informs my own, as reviewers are not simply consuming but creating their own texts based around primary texts. More specifically, they

utilize trailers and film clips in their videos, as well as constantly using images and stills from various movies to demonstrate their points.

Fandom

Within this thesis, film reviewers are considered as fans. I align with Sandvoss' definition of fandom as 'the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text' (2005: 8). He notes that 'in one form or another the emotional commitment of these fans is reflected in the regularity with which they visit and revisit their object of fandom' (Sandvoss 2005: 8). Film reviewers present themselves as regular viewers of cinema who frequently post videos to discuss films which are usually, but not restricted to, in release. Moreover, Sandvoss clarifies that there are clear examples of fans that are not disempowered by citing the qualitative work on sports fans such as Wann et al (1999), Scurr et al (1988), and UFA (1998).

Within this thesis, fans are not viewed as disempowered. Sandvoss' definition of fandom is usefully broad but it does provide complications as it has limited ability to accurately determine the extent of ones fanaticism. However, applying the criteria to film reviewers works precisely because they release videos documenting the media they have consumed making it easier to demonstrate how often they visit the object of their fandom. In addition, they tend to prioritize mainstream cinema over arthouse cinema, meaning that they fit within Sandvoss' argument of fandom being related to a 'popular narrative or text'. Tulloch and Jenkins (1995: 23) distinguish between 'fans, active participants within fandom as a social, cultural and interpretive institution, and followers,

audience members who regularly watch and engage media… programs but who claim no larger social identity on the basis of this consumption'. Abercrombie and Longhurst's approach in their book *Audiences* (1998) expands on this by distinguishing fans along three axes (media use, connectivity, and focus). Sandvoss notes that the only problem with Abercrombie & Longhurst's model is due to terminology, as different kinds of fans may not refer to themselves in the terms that Abercrombie & Longhurst outline (fans, cultists, enthusiasts) (2013). However, in Abercrombie and Longhurst's model, 'fans' intensely follow a particular cultural text or icon through mass media

I believe that qualifying how fans follow a particular cultural text 'intensely' presents an issue in that quantifying intensity is nigh impossible. But it is useful to note that I do not approach fans as an organization. -I instead consider fans of cinema as individuals committed to consuming texts. This is because, as Jenkins notes, fandom is perceived to be 'everywhere and all the time, a central part of the everyday lives of consumers operating within a networked society' (2007: 361). Film reviewers make constant claim to only speaking for themselves, demonstrating their fandom as an individual characteristic, rather than claiming a larger social identity.

However, I also approach film reviewers as performative members of fandom. Abercrombie & Longhurst refer to performance as an 'activity in which the person performing accentuates his or her behavior under the scrutiny of others' (1998: 40). Burgess and Green note that in the 1990s fan production was utilized by cultural studies 'that at least some of the audience – even for mass media like

commercial television – was active rather than 'passive''. (2013: 12). Studying YouTube as evidence of fan culture now makes clear that a huge section of fan audiences are actively participating in culture. I consider film reviewers as fans and approach their participation within my thesis as oppositional to traditional forms of film discourse, which are established in Chapter Two.

Sandvoss notes that 'performances in fandom are organized in relation, either in accordance or deliberate opposition, to persisting social and cultural conditions' (2005: 47), and Burgess and Green argue that 'Underlying fan studies is a commitment to the idea of everyday life as a site of potential creative resistance' (2013: 12). This approach can be seen to derive in part from theorists of everyday life like Michel de Certeau (1984). Throughout this thesis I repeatedly characterize film reviewers as providing a demotic perspective on film taste. My work therefore follows from the premise that fans can struggle against established norms, something they do without being part of a disempowered group. But fans can also conform to any set of norms. The productive practices of fans provide models for desired audience and consumer behavior (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, 2008), hence my approach to film reviewers as fans and my claim that they are useful for understanding audience behavior.

Taste

Film reviewers exhibit a specific form of taste as in their tastemaking. Each discipline that informs film studies (sociology, ethnography, etc) has its own

understanding of how to theorize taste. In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that 'taste is the basis of all that one has – peoples and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others' (1979: 77). Here, Bourdieu theorizes that legitimate taste in society is always the taste of the ruling class, arguing that this does not mean the ruling class necessarily have 'good' taste. Furthermore, Bourdieu's work theorizes that since one's social class is linked to taste, taste can be used to identify which social standing an individual is expected to be able to integrate with. Within this thesis, I replace the idea of the 'ruling class' with that of a critical class. The often-imagined persona of the critical class is that they decide what is good and bad and advise the public. In screen studies, Jason Mittell contributes to discussions around taste by arguing that taste is not only socially situated but also 'socially situating, a constantly mobile practice that reinscribes and constitutes the very divisions where it seems to be located and natural' (2004:101). Mittell clearly aligns with Bourdieu in arguing that taste is a social practice.

Within this thesis, film reviewers are theorized as a kind of taste public, an idea taken from Herbert J Gans, who provides a separate approach to Bourdieu. Gans undertakes an ethnographic approach to taste. He argues that choices are related to taste and that it is analyzable through 'research into consumer behavior and leisure' (1999: 92) and through this analysis, taste cultures can be theorized. Gans' taste cultures refer to shared values and standards, the people who share these being called a 'taste public' (1999: 92). He argues that different taste cultures and publics exist because of the 'diversity and disagreement about aesthetic standards and values'. However, Gans also argues that these taste

publics do not necessarily wish to be part of the other taste publics. Gans does not argue that one taste public sees itself as more legitimate, merely that different groups prefer to be part of their own taste culture. Within Gans' model, film reviewers can be viewed as representative of a certain taste public – i.e. the kind that watches films with the same approach as the film reviewer, of decontextualizing films and viewing them as visceral entertainment.

In addition to my application of Gans' ideas, Jukka Gronow's theory of judgment power directly informs the proceeding work. In his book *The Sociology of Taste*, Gronow writes about the French emergence of taste surrounding food. Refined and reserved taste overshadowed gluttony and even spread into Britain as a signifier of taste and class. The lower classes lived for the moment, but in the upper class pleasure was demonstrated in a more reserved manner (1997). This ties into Gronow's theory of judgment power (1993). Judgment power refers to the ability to discriminate better from worse when there is no standard to measure against. In terms of food and therefore literal taste, there is no hard standard of what is truly good or bad (unless one accepts food that is spoiled and can cause illness to be universally considered bad tasting, but film does not have the ability to kill you upon its conclusion).

Judgment power being utilized when there is no clear standard of good or bad relates directly to Edward McQuarrie, Jessica Miller, and Barbara J Phillips aforementioned work on the megaphone effect and McQuarrie's work on consumer taste. Firstly, as I have stated prior, different disciplines conceptualize taste differently. I draw on McQuarrie's sociological model of consumer taste

(2015). By this I mean that consumer taste refers to there being no clear 'better or worse' when judging anything, there is only what is more pleasing to more people (2015). Secondly, the megaphone effect refers to a phenomenon that 'occurs when ordinary consumers, defied as individuals lacking professional experience and not holding an institutional or family position, post to the web about consumption and acquire a mass audience for these posts' (McQuarrie et al 2013: 137). They note that reviews are best theorized as consumer behavior, since they are consumer advice to other consumers, and reference Graeme Turner's conceptual framework of the demotic turn (an increase in opportunities for ordinary people to appear in the media (2009)). Unlike Turner's work on the demotic turn being evidenced by reality television, McQuarrie et al explain that the megaphone effect does not require institutional certification or enablement. All of this is distinctly relevant to my own work on film reviewers as they are prime examples of the megaphone effect as explored throughout this thesis.

Finally, I argue that YouTube film reviewers are fan performers. They are simultaneously producers and consumers within a participatory culture. Whilst academics like Rosamund Davies have spoken about the 'low production values' and 'ordinary person perspective' (Davies 2011: 216, 222) of online content, the specific nuances of video criticism have not been examined. The emergence and proliferation of online video film criticism (in the form of film reviewers) in the digital age is a phenomenon that has gone relatively unexamined in film studies. My argument builds upon the work of Matthias Frey (2015), who argues that the internet has not completely removed the old guard of criticism and replaced it with tweets and micro-criticisms. Instead of explicitly gatekeeping films,

reviewers gently recommend films take on the roll of fans who make claims to be a demotic voice, presenting the viewpoint of the 'average' person. They are fans, who have been professionalized, meaning that they have brands and advertisers and are able to monetize their YouTube channels. The reviewers on YouTube are specifically projecting their singular opinion, maintaining that they are not the absolute authority but a consumer-to-consumer recommendation service. To summarize the framework applied within this thesis, film reviewers are approached as ordinary consumers posting to a mass audience, giving judgments on whether a film is good or bad from a consumer perspective, ie , whatever is most popular is good. Film reviewers are members of a taste public with a similar approach to understanding and judging film.

Chapter 2: Codes and Conventions of Film Criticism and YouTube

This chapter examines the history of both film criticism and YouTube. In order to fully understand why film reviewers employ specific video production methods and styles, it is necessary to examine aspects of history. This is because film reviewers on YouTube represent a marrying of both film criticism and YouTube's histories and as such a combination of the codes present in both forms. Film criticism has existed as a profession since '*The New York Dramatic Mirror* introduced a page dedicated to the moving pictures in May 1908' (Roberts 2010:17). By comparison, the domain name of www.youtube.com, which would become one of the key hosts of video graphic film criticism and reviewing, was registered in 2005 and shot to popularity in 2006, giving it a relatively short lifespan., The precise emergence of film reviewers is difficult to track and as is noted throughout this thesis, I use the term 'film reviewer' but acknowledge its inconsistent meaning in online discourse. This chapter identifies the codes that have historically been present in both film criticism and on YouTube, as well as some of the reasons behind their usage. The intention behind this is to inform the reader on how film criticism has developed to allow film reviewers to exist alongside critics in both complementary and opposing forms.

Additionally, this chapter aims to discuss why film reviewers on YouTube are specifically defined by the form and content of YouTube. Film reviewers have emerged from the same conventions and function as film critics whilst diverging on presentation and analytical style. The reason proposed within this thesis is

that they are informed by the codes and conventions of YouTube, having a more demotic voice distinct from contemporary film criticism. Regardless, this chapter discusses the distinct elements that form film critics and the content creators on YouTube in order to place film reviewers within the context of film discourse on YouTube.

Film Criticism

The term 'film critic' is unwieldy and debated within academia. Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan characterize film criticism simply as 'a form of writing which addresses films as potential achievements' (2011). Matthias Frey concurs noting how film criticism has been viewed as an evaluative tool, an amateurish reaction to films, or as an in-depth critique (2015). This provides a solid basis for the definition of film criticism used within this thesis. By contrast in *The Telegraph*, Sarah Crompton offers a broader and less academic definition of what a critic is, arguing that 'a critic is someone who devotes their time to cultural judgment. They don't exist simply to give a thumbs up or thumbs down' (2013). This brief thesis is unconcerned with devoting extended time to exploring the complexities of the term 'film critic' or even 'film criticism' in general.

However, in the introduction I argued that for the purposes of this thesis a film critic is a professional individual who engages in discourse around a film with the intention of giving a recommendation towards the reader/audience of whether they should spend money to see the film or not. Film critics gate-keep movies, meaning they present a perspective on whether a film is good or bad and try and guide the viewer to that conclusion. Therefore, for the purposes of this

thesis, film criticism is a form of persuasive writing that is indicative of taste, not a judgment of absolute value. Due to the origins of film criticism in print media, film criticism does not inherently encourage participation. This is because it was originally more difficult to interact with the printed critic.

Film criticism can be summarized as 'a specific kind of writing with a specific function... that of a consumer's guide' (Lesage 1974: 12). This definition essentially makes "film critic" a banner term for someone who has a core function of recommending a film to the public, decrying whether or not it is worth the time and money of the viewer. However, throughout this chapter when I discuss film critics I speak about the broad label utilized across history. The aforementioned definition of what constitutes a film critic is one that continues to be appropriate for film critics as a broad label across time, despite the form of film criticism changing since its conception.

Film criticism has always retained a subjective and persuasive aspect of its writing. As the press developed over history, general critics appeared taking on an important role in the public discourse around culture 'as the media became more commercialized they faced pressure to satisfy the needs of editors and their readers by producing copy that would entertain.' (Rixon 2011: 41). Discussing the postwar era of cinema in *The Complete History of Film Criticism* (2010), Jerry Roberts describes film critics as amateurs, stating that initial film critics 'didn't have the training, persuasiveness, and knowledge to help the average reader discern what was good or bad, significant or overrated…The general opinion of film critics up until the 1960s was that they were,

predominantly, composers of plot précis with an opinion tacked on' (2010: 95). By contrast, Roberts demonstrates the development of the film critic when he references notable critic Dwight McDonald who wrote 'Before the ultimate is reached, a critic goes through a process of defining, describing, reasoning, and persuading which is drawn from his own special experience and knowledge and which may or may not persuade his readers that his judgment is more accurate—'true' or 'right' would be claiming too much—than other judgments, according to experience and knowledge. Readers have their own ideas, too, if they're worth writing for' (2010). The evolution of the film critic saw them develop into experts, becoming worthy of their function of taste arbiter, but they have always been encouraged to be entertaining so as to be engaging. McDonald's statement gives insight into the process of a self-declared film critic. It is notable that McDonald reasons that the critic draws from experience and knowledge specifically to persuade a reader as this is an important convention of film criticism: its function is to convince and persuade the reader by demonstrating their expertise.

Moreover, the language of film criticism aids the persuasive nature of a film critics' work as they present themselves as knowledgeable but also relatable. Whilst film critics do have a form that has developed and changed with the digital age, the popular image of the film critic in visual media is as an intellectual, an image derived from the proliferation of *Cahiers du Cinema* and other publications historically contextualizing criticism as an elite and intellectual practice The emergence of film studies and application of different models in academia has also helped to establish film writing as an elite practice.

Throughout this thesis when referring to "traditional" film criticism, I do not explicitly refer to a real perspective or persona but to this popular image across media. The intellectual image of the expert film critic as shown in the Appendix is the predominant imagined image across media. Language used by film critics emphasizing their knowledge aids in the production of an intellectual critic; they are persuasive because they are experts. To take a specific example, consider the following excerpt from MTV film critic Amy Nicholson's writing on *Alien: Covenant* (2017):

> The spaceship *Covenant,* director Ridley Scott's latest flying deathtrap, carries 15 crew members, 2000 colonists, 1400 embryos, and zero pandas. Pandas insist on eating empty calorie bamboo – they're bears denying their carnivorous biology to chow down on 20-foot celery – and procreate so apathetically that cubs become Earth celebrities. Clearly there's no sense in shipping self-destructive animals to colonize new planet Origae-6; as a species, they're almost suicidal. Instead, the *Covenant* packed humans. But in Scott's *Alien* franchise, humans are no smarter. Yet again, in *Alien: Covenant,* the sixth film in the series, a crew sniffs after a mysterious ping and sticks their collective nose in a deadly larva pod. Are our astronauts learning? God no – they're still hell-bent on their own extinction. And if the audience expected a different plot, we're not learning either. (2017)

This excerpt is the first of several paragraphs conclusively arguing that the *Alien: Covenant* (2017) is not worth the reader's money. This particular paragraph opens the piece and neatly summarizes Nicholson's approach to the film succinctly and in an entertaining way. The comparison to pandas is an astute one emphasizing the nature of the characterization within the film and stating plainly that characters in the film make stupid decisions. The comparison also

demonstrates a witty and interesting comparison that aids in the construction of a relatable, humorous and generally knowledgeable reviewer. The paragraph concludes by telling the reader directly that they should not expect anything new or interesting from the film implicitly confirming that Nicholson has seen the other films and is therefore informed on the subject that she speaks about. She questions the cognitive faculties of the astronauts, implicitly arguing that she is more intelligent than the characters in the film and aiding the construction of her image as intellectual. However, she uses the pronoun 'we' to identify herself as within the same imagined community as the reader, implying that Nicholson's judgments are identical to theirs. It then is implied that it is common sense to agree with Nicholson.

To take a second example, writer FilmCritHulk uses long-form online essays as his preferred method of film criticism. Whilst Nicholson uses a clear argument and humorous comparisons to make her points more persuasive, FilmCritHulk lays out long and thorough arguments to create an intellectual image of himself, the irony of his chosen avatar creating a humorous comparison (the Hulk is not a character traditionally known for high intellect). This extract presents part of FilmCritHulk's argument around *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018):

> Please understand, I was excited as anyone a decade ago. My chosen pseudonym is not happenstance. I grew up loving Marvel comics. I watched good old Bill Bixby after school. But since then, I have also become enamored with the notions of dramatic storytelling and worshipping at the altar of cinematic function. And after 19 films, I can admit that Marvel has gotten rather good at spooling these two-and-a-half-hour interlocking

> blockbusters that often manage to be both charmingly entertaining and yet disjointed slogs all at once.
>
> Sure, there was some solid character building in phase one (along with the first entries for other characters), but free from the "burden" of origin stories, they've only managed to master the art of endless stasis—the art of rearranging the pieces on the board while teasing out the nature of their "grand story." There's a constant promise that they're building to bigger moments and crescendos that will surely be of grand importance! Which just means we have extended a lot of good will to the MCU, in part because it's always putting the carrot on a stick and leading our lumbering tortoise ever forward.

These paragraphs neatly demonstrate his apparent intellect, persuading the reader to respect his supposition on the movie. FilmCritHulk positions his work personally; being open with the reader about his history with the Marvel comics and then demonstrates his expertise by clearly arguing his points in a digestible manner. Whilst the above extract is not an example of explicitly academic criticism, FilmCritHulk does argue eloquently and utilises language to create an intellectually engaging argument without necessarily concerning himself with the opinion of the reader. FilmCritHulk's work is consistent with the image of a traditional film critic, a guide to better understanding film.

However, as briefly detailed in past chapters, there is significant debate on whether film criticism has a more specific form or specific characteristics. Clayton and Klevan argue that the most characteristic trait of a newspaper or online review is the 'announcement of judgments on the acting, story and

cinematography' (2011: 1). Ronan McDonald has a broader interpretation, writing that criticism is the act of passing judgment but also 'implies explanation, commentary, summary, analysis, interpretation, de-coding and so on' (2007: 42). When Paul Rixon talks about critics, he refers to works as part of 'the mediated public sphere' (2011: 18) and that often the title of critic is 'bestowed on them by the media' (2011: 19) meaning that there may be no specific form of criticism, since the media ultimately decides potentially arbitrarily. Peter B. Orlik in his work *Media Criticism in a Digital Age* defines media criticism as 'the collective practice of evaluation without explanation'; he argues that 'both comprehension and judgment are essential' (2005: 3- 4). This gatekeeping function is the key quality of film criticism, meaning that film critics are a form of interpreter between a film and the audience meant to serve the public in some way by indicating how the consumers might spend their money or their time. However, whilst this admittedly broad definition constructed here does demonstrate the function of a critic, it demonstrates nothing about the specific form of film criticism, which as Jerry Roberts argues, and as noted, has evolved over time from reductive plot recaps to detailed and convincing works of writing (Roberts 2010). In comparison, film reviews have an identical function to film critics, however reviewers often position themselves as an alternative to film critics. Therefore, when defining film reviewers on YouTube, the film critic must be constantly addressed.

Furthermore, I approach "film critic" as a banner term rather than a strict definition partially because what constitutes or defines a film critic has been thrown into question in the digital age. Due to Twitter, the 'public water cooler'

(Tryon 2013:120), as well as to other social media sites and practices such as blogging, the internet has made filmmakers more accessible as it is possible to converse with them on Twitter. To clarify, 'public water cooler', is used to reference the casual nature of conversations online. Furthermore, the proliferation of blogs (both in written and video formats) has allowed writers the freedom to share opinions and write about films without needing to be edited, proofread or published officially. Instead, significant attention, in the form of millions of quantifiable views, is paid to film reviews on video sharing sites like YouTube. In this way, film reviewers are a clear example of the megaphone effect (McQuarrie et al 2013) being applied to film criticism, as there are more opportunities for the layman to argue their perspective online as film reviewers. Whilst film reviewers share the same function of recommending movies as film critics and therefore fit under the banner term "film critic", they differ in the sense that film reviewers are unqualified individuals who are given a platform by social media and video sharing sites. Film criticism has evolved from reductive plot recaps in the post-war period to a level of expertise and now, more simplistic lay-person perspectives has begun to proliferate online discourse. Film criticism's history appears somewhat circular.

YouTube

Because of the aforementioned way that film reviewers on YouTube are individual voices and largely self-employed, it is important to understand why YouTube is the ideal video-sharing site for their content. This is a manageable goal given the relative youth of YouTube. Additionally, the amount of content

allows researchers to trace the development of codes[2] on the video-sharing site. No discussion of YouTube should ignore the preferred modality of many of the site's content creators: vlogging, or a video blog — an update on the life of an individual or a small group.

The broad history of YouTube is as follows: YouTube came about because of a noticeable lack of ways to share video online. Patricia Lange notes that 'the site's earliest beginnings stemmed from its founders' desire to share videos of interest' but this was difficult at the time because of the high bandwidth of video files (2015: 8). Founders Chad Hurley, Steve Chan and Jawed Karim activated the domain name YouTube.com on February 14th 2005. A year later, YouTube was one of the fastest growing websites, with over 65,000 new videos being uploaded daily, delivering 100 million views. It has grown significantly since then, being bought by Google for $1.7 billion in October 2006 (Hopkins 2006) and as of September 2016, according to YouTube's statistics, there are over a billion users and over 300 hours of video uploaded every minute (statisticsbrain 2016). Lange states that 'In its initial years, the site garnered interest in part because of the wide variety of videos it displayed, including both amateur and professional fare, and in part because it allowed participants to interact and comment on videos' (2015: 8). This has led to numerous thriving digital communities being formed.

[2] John Fiske describes a code as 'a governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture' (John Fiske 1987: 4).

YouTuber Liam Dryden sums up the specific appeal of YouTube on the webseries *Becoming Youtube* (2012) when he exclaims that 'You can be whoever you want'. Ironically though, the YouTuber vlogging style is associated with authenticity and ordinariness, as can be gathered from vlogging's origins. According to M. Sean Kaminsky's book *Naked Lens*, the first video blog, *The Journey*, was posted in 2000. It chronicled the author's (username 9Adam Kontras) move from Columbus, Ohio to California; however the style is significantly different from what vlogging has become on YouTube. Rather than a handheld camera style, the Vlog format is now associated with a still camera, recording a mid or occasionally close up shot with usually one individual in frame. For reference I have included several shots of the traditional vlog style in the Appendix. Whilst not definitively titled as a "vlog", the practice of vlogging can be defined by looking at the shared characteristics between videos titled as Vlogs and videos that are not explicitly titled as such. In addition to the Vlog style of camera, Vlogs must remain personal in some aspect. In the Zoella video in the Appendix she is discussing her panic attacks, so whilst it is not labeled as such, it does conform to the Vlog standardization that I have laid out for this thesis.

Additionally, throughout this thesis I repeatedly refer to the form of vlogging on YouTube because it is an essential aspect of YouTube's identity and therefore film reviewers' identities. A video on the YouTube channel Foldable Ideas offers some informed discourse on the subject. Foldable Ideas' creator Dan Olsen contends that vlogs have a distinct rhythm and cadence to their speech:

> Vlogs, by the nature of their creation, trend towards chaotic and loose. When we're speaking extemporaneous, we pause to collect our thoughts, we um and ah and uh and we repeat ourselves… the extemporaneous personality of the person doing the vlogging merged with an aesthetic delivery that is decidedly unauthentic. The end result becoming a form of hyper-reality…This hyper-real cadence has, for better or worse, become intrinsic to the wider dialect… It is merely what YouTube sounds like.

Olsen's work concurs with the notion that the perceived authenticity is intrinsic to the appeal of YouTube. Olsen notes that the inauthenticity of editing in vlogging is now what YouTube is. Hyperrealism emphasizes the performer's individual identity whilst clearly being a fabricated perspective. It is a mediated identity presented as identity. Moreover, Henry Jenkins has written about the vaudevillian comparison to YouTube, both being actor-centric (2016). He argues that there are certain stylistic choices – such as being performed directly to the camera -which 'preserve the integrity of individual performance' as well as explicitly 'courting the attention and approval of the viewer'. The understanding of vlogging within this dissertation confers with Jenkins' writings on the topic, the individual performance being prioritized in a hierarchy of importance on YouTube. The reviewer performing in this manner fits with the emphasis on YouTube of the individual's personality as the content of the videos. The personality is the managed content on YouTube.

Chapter 3: What are Reviewers?

This chapter explores the specifics of how film reviewers can be defined. Whilst I have previously briefly defined film reviewers as content creators on YouTube that provide a movie recommendation service to viewers, this does not fully explain the form of film reviewing and how film reviewers exaggerate the conventions of film criticism and go to further lengths to be seen as relatable. Therefore, this chapter closely examines the many facets of film reviewers. Film reviewers offer a tastemaking function and often grade the movie they are reviewing, they make clear that they speak for themselves, offering an opinion rather than claiming any knowledge about film or what truly makes a movie good. As explored in more detail within this chapter, they are self-styled amateurs, meaning they portray themselves as amateurs whilst professionalizing the representation of themselves. They utilize the heterotopic space of their personal rooms (Peter & Seier 2009: 199) to reinforce their individual approach to film discourse. They are also defined within this chapter as critical consumers, a kind of consumer similar to a brand advocate (Rob Fugetta 2012).

Since film reviewers occupy a similar social position to film critics it is appropriate that the first section of this chapter examines how reviewers relate to film critics. The central argument within this chapter is that film reviewers have diverged from traditional critical approaches, becoming demotic voices within the film critic genre and functioning as tastemakers rather than gatekeepers. This section allows my argument to establish how film reviewers differ from past interpretations of film critics. Additionally, I explore film

reviewers as critical consumers as this is a fundamental aspect of their tastemaking function.

Secondly, this chapter explores film reviewers' connection to participatory culture. 'Participatory culture' is a space where 'fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content' (Henry Jenkins 2006: 290). This second section introduces the view that they are fan performers. This thesis interprets fans as regularly consuming a 'given narrative or text' (Sandvoss 2005: 8) and therefore 'fan performers' as members of a fandom who demonstrate their fandom through performance. Film reviewers perform film reviews to release on YouTube. Additionally, this section explores how reviewers present themselves through the use of YouTube codes and conventions. This section expands on the film reviewer's idiosyncratic and singular opinion. Reviewers demonstrate their fandom around cinema and, to some degree, claim a larger social identity based on a shared fandom specific to cinema. Additionally, the presentation of film reviewers as authentic both in the visuals of the videos but also the language used by film reviewers is explored within this chapter. The definition of film reviewers constructed by this chapter is essential to the overall argument of this thesis.

1)How does film reviewing differ from film criticism?

Gatekeeping, or Tastemaking from a consumer perspective?

As previously stated, I theorize film reviewers through McQuarrie et al's consumer taste model (2015). I define film reviewers as consumers performing as tastemakers rather than as gatekeepers (traditional film criticism functions as

the latter). In the new critical economy, it is questionable as to whether the gate even exists. The gatekeeper metaphor presumes that a critical class has some control over the circulation of content. But in the case studies briefly analyzed in this chapter and discussed in depth in Chapter Four, the subjects of film reviewers' content is already in very wide circulation and presumed to have been viewed. Additionally, within this thesis film reviewers are interpreted as critical consumers. Thanks to this, they are able to function as tastemakers, meaning that they guide the audience's opinion and discern what is popular. Film reviewers are amateurs that are interested in whether the movie is popular and will impress people. They are often not invited to critical screenings, instead they act in the same manner as the average consumer but produce content about their viewing experience.

Film reviewers create an image of themselves as tastemakers via the presentation of themselves as relatable and trustworthy individuals. In this way, film reviewers attempt to have their opinions valued in the same way as a friend or family member. In *Brand Advocats* Rob Fugetta argues that friends and family members' recommendations are the most trusted across consumers explaining why film reviewers' presentation of themselves as trustworthy and similar to the presumed viewer aids their position as tastemakers and social influencers (2012).

Film reviewers are not experts

In addition to a film reviewer's function as a tastemaker, another aspect that defines film reviewers is that they make no claim to expertise. In Chapter Two I

argued that, in addition to the truth of being a film critic, there is an often-recreated image of a film critic. This recurring image is one that is largely an imaginary construct in the digital age, portraying the critic as a snobbish out-of-touch person who does not care about the troubled artist. Reviewers define themselves against this imagined perspective rather than a realistic example of a critic, creating a strawman. Therefore, a reviewer is not necessarily interested in exploring the depth of a film in an intellectual way. Film reviewers often explore movies within a specific pop-cultural context, utilizing a visceral gut response, the immediate and somewhat inexplicable 'feeling' of a film to describe their feelings towards a movie.

Film reviewers use language that is straight forward and easy to understand. This does not mean that they are incapable of using technical language. In fact, some reviewers are quite adept at understanding the critical or technical terminology and have backgrounds working in jobs tangential to the film sector. However, key to understanding the reviewer is knowing that reviewers casually converse with the audience and have a limited well of knowledge to entertain the audience with the video and personality of the reviewer. In the Appendix, figure 3 shows the Flesch-Kincaid readability scores of the film reviewers studied within this thesis and for comparison four traditional film critics' readability scores. As demonstrated, the reviewers' Flesch reading-ease scores and Flesch-Kincaid grade being higher than critics' scores shows that film reviewers are easier to understand. In making sure that their videos are easily understandable, the videos are presented as less of a persuasion tactic and more of an icebreaker to continue a conversation.

Film reviewers encourage participation in a way that past film criticism has not. As demonstrated by the ending of his videos, Jeremy Jahns and other reviewers always encourage participation by asking the audience's opinion of the film reviewed. Unlike traditional film criticism, which was a form of gatekeeping, the viewers having seen the movie before watching the review is as likely as not. Film reviewers' videos only partially fulfill a gatekeeping function and have equal amounts in common with vlog videos, meaning that they give brief insights into the existence of an individual. Jeremy Jahns in particular directly invites the viewer to attempt to continue a conversation with himself and participate further within film culture. Film reviewers can be potentially spoken to about films and often reply to their viewers. Additionally, through the encouragement of the feedback from the viewer, the reviewer gives away his position as expert, encouraging the rest of the taste public to contribute their perspective equally. Since reviewers present themselves as laypersons, when they invite responses from the audience, they are inherently encouraging the viewer to create reviews and response or reaction videos, or to circulate their videos to discuss the film being reviewed.

Additionally, whereas past forms of film criticism were edited and held to a professional journalistic standard in newspapers and magazines, by contrast, in order to invoke a casual tone with the viewer, film reviews often appear as stream-of-consciousness conversations. An academic film critic on YouTube would be Lindsay Ellis. Ellis does not fit with the reviewer definition that I am outlining; instead she purposefully tackles subjects with an analytical approach,

taking on the role of a lecturer. Using her video on *Phantom of the Opera* (2004) as an example, Ellis addresses multiple interpretations of the film, structuring her critique as part of an auteurist framework and consistently historicizing the film, arguing how it fits into the landscape of film at the time and showing a synthesized conclusion at the end of the video. By comparison, film reviewer Jeremy Jahns demonstrates the reviewer's lack of historicizing, as he has on several occasions not done any research into the films he discusses or potentially does not deem it relevant to mention. This is most obvious in cases when he fails to identify remakes; for instance he does not identify that *Arthur* (2011) is a remake of a hit 1981 comedy. His approach is much less structured than Ellis', appearing to announce different topics with no clear order. It is not my intention to imply one of these forms is superior to the other merely that they have different approaches to judging films. Jahns prefers to enter into films from the apparent perspective of an uninformed viewer, not an expert, experiencing the film outside of context. Film reviewers exaggerate the conventions of film criticism but go to further lengths to be seen as relatable.

Furthermore, film reviewers often perform in such a way that their mediated identities express pride at their lack of expertise. YouTube film reviewers' opinions are often prefaced with a disparaging comparison to critics. To take a specific example, in his review of *Legend of the Guardians* (2010), Jahns states 'I've already seen some critics just nitpick the shit out of this movie and they're all just like…' Jahns then proceeds to impersonate a critic, mockingly portraying said critic as upper class, distinctly English and using the phrase 'It's not a tour

de force' before concluding that that was his 'impersonation of a douchebag' (2010: 1:59 – 2:12). He elaborates that said critics should just explore their inner child. Jahns, regardless of intention, is implicitly arguing that the "douchebag critics" do not give films a fair critique, because they expect too much from films. Jahns implies that the elitist audience can't possibly enjoy itself the same way the ordinary person can in the cinema. Of course, his own discussion of the film is, therefore, limited in scope, referring to the film as 'cool' and 'badass' whilst acknowledging that it is badass despite the fact that the movie centers on owls (a detail he believes is important for the viewer to understand the trepidation over his opinion).

Jahns has established himself as an opposing force to the "critic" without actually delving into any of the actual complaints that "critics" held, instead creating a straw argument. Whilst Jahns makes no explicit claims to know better, he encourages a relaxed attitude towards film viewing, allowing the 'inner child' to emerge and accept whatever is shown on screen, Jahns himself states that his opinion of the film and lax attitude towards rating is driven by nostalgia, as the movie reminds him of several films from the 80s. So, through this brief conversational analysis, it can be understood how Jahns specifically and - as I will establish throughout this thesis - reviewers in general, establish themselves as a demotic alternative film critic in order to provide a demotic perspective**.** Film reviewers on YouTube do not focus on cinema in depth. They make no claim to be able to read cinema in a way different to their audience and in some cases state outright that they are not film critics to create a distinct image of themselves in the minds of the viewer.

Moreover, on several occasions, Jahns specifically states he is not a critic. He only considers what appeals to himself as an individual different from critics – an 'ordinary person'. He argues that critics describe films in 'overly used, artsy elitist talk' (2010). Jahns identifies himself as 'against critics,' even offhand remarking that they are elitist. Taking a less in-depth stance and interpretation is not a negative quality for the reviewer, through this shallower reading of the film text they are able to release more videos quicker, an essential aspect of being prominent on YouTube. Through Jahns and other reviewers who repeat Jahns' rhetoric about being different from critics, reviewers write for their imagined community of like-minded viewers.

Whereas Jahns conforms to an ordinary viewer narrative and denies a critical or expert status, Chris Stuckmann refers to himself as a critic in his *Unbreakable – Movie Review* video (2016). Additionally, Stuckmann is Rotten Tomatoes certified, so he is able to contribute to the critical rating of films on Rotten Tomatoes. For reference, two specific video critic guidelines on Rotten Tomatoes are as follows:

> Critics must be able to demonstrate a consistent level of professionalism and insight in both their reviews and in the production of their videos.
>
> Video critics must have at least 20,000 subscribers on a video hosting site.

When contacted for clarification, Rotten Tomatoes did not respond making it still unclear what the website means - as professionalism and insight are difficult

to measure. As it is written, the criteria appear highly subjective but allow Rotten Tomatoes to perform their own gatekeeping function of the critical class. Irrespective of this, this certification plays into Stuckmann's presence as an intellectual reviewer. On the other hand, Stuckmann defines himself in opposition to other critics in the *Split –Movie Review* video, decrying he 'hates when critics do that' in reference to spoiling the plots of films. His inconsistency in defining himself makes clear that reviewers in general consider themselves separate to an imagined image of a film critic, an amorphous group of intellectuals distinct from the ordinary person film reviewer. Film reviewers consider themselves and aim to be seen as relatable. For the purposes of this study and the interests of engaging the definition of what it means to be a critic, Stuckmann does still conform to the definition of a reviewer that I have laid out. However, his certification as critic on Rotten Tomatoes goes another way to legitimizing him and reviewers in general. Stuckmann does not go into more depth than Jahns in his reviews but does speak with more technical language (as is examined in the next chapter). In Stuckmann's case the role of reviewer has been legitimized to the point where it is accepted as a more informed 'ordinary person'.

Finally, unlike prior forms of film criticism, film reviewers on YouTube use the vlog format that emphasizes the casual and conversational nature of the videos, emphasizing their lay-perspective. In Chapter Two, the visual vernacular that recurs across content on YouTube was discussed. Reviewers share this vernacular and as such, their videos have the same format of vlog videos. They feature asides and jump cuts and talk directly to the audience, playing out skits

where they pretend to be the studio speaking to the viewing audience, such as when Andre, the "Black Nerd," pretends to be Marvel Studios telling audiences that 'you already know what's going on, you already know the Spider-Man story, we don't have to go through it again' (2017). The same creator laughs repeatedly in a lot of videos, leaving the laughs in the finished product before jump cutting to the next point he is making. The point of leaving in the laughter is seemingly to emphasize the 'reality' of the video, with his honest response being clear and his own laugh adding to the casual 'conversational' atmosphere of the videos. The conversational aspects of film reviewers' videos are explored later on within the section when discussing how film reviewers are YouTubers. Irrespective of this, the conversational style is a direct contrast to other film critics' more professional mode of writing. Film reviewers converse casually with the viewer, gently introducing technical language whilst remaining easily accessible to an audience that desires a connection to their movie recommendation service. Rather than being a knowledgeable expert, film reviewers' ensure they are a relatable and accessible figure. Reviewers eschew any expertise in favor of exaggerating the entertainer aspect of their identity.

Film reviewers belong to a specific taste public (1992: 92) which can be viewed as part of the film reviewer's appeal to a layman audience. Reviewers use Gronow's idea of judgment power (1993), which refers to the power to discriminate better from worse where there is no standard. "Better," in this case, means more pleasing to more people. Gans states that different taste cultures arise because of the general disagreement and diversity of aesthetic values and standards (1992). Film reviewers are vocal representations for individual taste

cultures. Gans' theorizing of lower-middle culture was originally professed to be the dominant taste culture; in his revision he states that this is still true but the lower-middle class have developed with the progression of the Internet. McQuarrie addresses 'taste' as a concept prevalent in multiple disciplines. Most relevant is the field of aesthetics, the critic appreciating art and disapproving of work that shows lack of value. Taste is also claimed by sociology, which links to Bourdieu. McQuarrie points out, 'good taste' is linked to class by Bourdieu (albeit Bourdieu does not condone this notion, merely presents it). Under the ethnographic approach to taste there is no 'good' or 'bad' taste in the aesthetic sense, only 'my taste', which can become 'our taste'. This differs from the sociological viewpoint because it is predicated on there being no social hierarchy, only different groups. Gans' claims question the ethnographic approach since he professed a mixed ethnographic and sociological approach. But this thesis is written a significant amount of time after Gans and, by Gans' own admission, society shifts over time. Even Bourdieu's class distinctions have been developed and elaborated into further categories. However, McQuarrie argues that ethnography owns the definition of taste in popular culture because in-group affiliations are linked to identity. This is useful to my model but more appropriate is his explanation of consumer taste. In this understanding of taste, McQuarrie argues that taste in his consumer sociological model has to be ratified by others before it can be called good or bad. Film reviewers often present themselves as representative of the views of the ordinary person. In this way, they are only valuable to a mass audience because they generally affirm what a general audience believes.

At the beginning of this thesis, I referenced a *Variety* article that stated 'I think critics write for other critics' (2007) and it indeed appears reviewers do this as well, partially writing for the everyday person and partially writing against their imagined enemy – the film critic. Furthermore, film reviewers on YouTube do not speak like traditional critics: their appeal is in their personality as regular individuals. Therefore, there isn't a wide lexicon; instead there is a casual speech pattern, misappropriating words occasionally, as if the viewer is having a conversation. In lieu of descriptive language, reviewers use movie references ad infinitum in videos, the movie references also acting as the reviewer's credentials whilst informing the audience about the taste of the reviewer. In place of a degree or experience within the industry in some capacity, simply knowing movies is enough to communicate a level of 'expertise'. To take a specific example, in his 'I am Number Four' review (2011), Jeremy Jahns states:

> 'The bad guys in this movie kind of look like the Romulans from the new Star Trek meets the vampires from 30 days of Night… yeah.
> The concept of this movie was really bogged down by the high school thing. I mean, you're this badass alien with all these special powers and you have to go to high school. Can't you just be like John Connor in T2 and never go to high school. It worked for him.
> Whenever I see special things taking place in high school nowadays I think one thing… (image of Twilight movie poster on screen)… Yeah.'. (0.55 – 1.13)

This excerpt demonstrates Jahns' specific attempt to be understood in a different way than critics. But more generally this excerpt demonstrates his status as a fan of film and an assumption that his viewers are part of the same subculture and share his familiarity with particular pop-culture texts. The references themselves act as shorthand for his opinion on originality, high school stories and *Twilight* (2008). Jahns here communicates a significant amount of information. He does not speak like a film critic, choosing to leave in breaks in his speech and repeating the word 'yeah' to emphasize points and jokes. At the same time, the multiple movie references demonstrate his affinity for film and even what specific movie fandom (Twilight) he disapproves of.

John Flickinger aka TheFlickPic speaks casually, demonstrating his position as a demotic film reviewer. He defines himself in *GHOSTBUSTERS (2016) – Movie Review* as 'just a dude who likes movies'. Flickinger contrasts wildly with the reviewers that I have previously discussed, not in the set up of his videos – which look similar to Stuckmann's, with Flickinger surrounded by geek ephemera – but in the content. Flickinger's half formed sentences and poorly worded opinions mean that his videos often have no logical progression to them, with Flickinger jumping back and forth between points and using connectives that are hardly appropriate for the sentence being formed. One example of his mishandling of the English language would be when he calls the villain in *Suicide Squad* (2016) 'uncharacteristic' when he discusses the 'boring' villain (2016).

Various other malapropisms are littered throughout Flickinger's videos making his mediated identity the least professional reviewer I have discussed so

far as his videos are the loosest in structure. Even Jahns is voluble in his videos, but Flickinger truly presents himself as a member of the general audience who simply records his thoughts without thinking or composing himself after viewing. For example in his *Warcraft – Movie Review* (2016) he argues that actor Ben Foster cannot play a wizard because 'there are some scenes towards the end of this movie where things are getting crazy and Ben Foster is this wizard, and there's prosthetics and you're just like… what the fuck is that? He looks like a big pickle'. Flickinger's critique does not include a substantial argument. His musings on the prosthetics and look of a character in a fantasy film based on a video game are somewhat nonsensical and difficult to understand, features that comprise part of the performance and therefore the appeal of the video. Flickinger's conversational tone emphasizes his effort to appeal to a taste public that aligns with his perspective.

2)Film reviewers as fans within participatory culture

As stated previously, within this thesis film reviewers are approached as fans A.K.A individuals who consume a 'given narrative or text' (Sandvoss 2005: 8). Specifically, film reviewers are interpreted as performative members of a fandom that revolves around cinema. I propose that this viewpoint, when combined with their existence on YouTube, allows for an interpretation of film reviewers as facilitators of participatory and interactive culture, and therefore demotic gateways into film culture.

To take a brief aside to deal with terminology, there is the question of whether it is appropriate to consider film reviewers cinephiles since their specific fandom is the broad medium of film. There is a dichotomy in film, television and cultural studies that is briefly considered here, that being whether film fans can be considered cinephiles, or potentially whether these two terms intersect. This thesis considers a fan someone who consumes a text regularly. Henry Jenkins defines fandom as referring to 'the social structures and cultural practices created by the most passionately engaged consumers' and includes 'participatory culture' which is 'any kind of cultural production which starts at the grassroots level and which is open to broad participation' (2010). Cinephilia is a term similarly related to devotion; in their opening essay in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (2005), Marjike de Valck and Malte Hagener argue how cinephilia 'alludes to the universal phenomenon that the film experience evokes particular sensations of intense pleasure resulting in a strongly felt connection to the cinema, often described as a relation of love' (2005: 11). On the other hand, aside from the romanticizing of the term, cinephilia is also a heavily politicized

term with a strong elitist history behind it. and then argue that additionally the term cinephilia was used in the *Cahiers du cinema* as a tool to legitimize certain standards of cinema over others. Willeman argues that 'cinephilia is a term born out of French culture and discourse' in relation to a phenomenon that 'unified the relationship to the cinema of groups of people who otherwise had positions quite opposed to one another' (1994: 223). Cinephilia as a term has a lot of negative and elitist connotations surrounding it but when simplified it means a love of cinema.

As evidenced through the definitions given above, a link can clearly be drawn between cinephilia and fandom. However, the distinction between them lies in the participation factor essential to Jenkins' and my own definitions of what constitutes a fan. Ted Pigeon notes that cinephilia is often seen in film studies as 'being limited to the love and consumption of cinematic images' (2012: 164). But as expanded on by Pigeon, 'digital culture appears to grant the cinephile a level of participation in cinema previously only available to those in the professional ranks of film criticism' (2012: 165). YouTube acts as the catalyst for the online cinephiles to act as fans by participating in a shared culture of film appreciation. Fans of cinema can be seen as cinephiles because at a base level, fanatical cinema fans are individuals who love film.

Film reviewers can be theorized as cinephiles but this is not the most effective means of theorizing them. The reviewers investigated within this study are technologically flourishing cinephiles, fans of cinema that participate in online discourse and have the potential to dictate the direction of the discourse through

the content of their videos. However, instead of using the politicized term of 'cinephile' that is ripe with its own connotations of elitism, 'fans' would be accurate to describe film reviewers on YouTube. Fans that participate in discourse with other fans of cinema. These reviewers can give insight into the updated definition of what it means to be a fan in the digital age. Film reviewers on YouTube are give insight into fandom because of the way that 'participatory fandom' positions everyone 'as equals within an active fan community, thus having the fans' best interests at heart because they are all members of the same community' (Miller 2017: 50). The film reviewer presents themselves as no more experienced than other demotic film fans except for video creation. In this way, film reviewers can be seen as what Jenkins refers to as 'fan critics' (1992: 86). Importantly, he argues that fans have a different kind of knowledge than academic critics and states that 'fans tend to see themselves in highly individualistic terms, emphasizing their refusal to conform to "mundane" social norms' (1992: 88).

Furthermore, the notion that film reviewers can be viewed as fan critics can be explored further. Every film reviewer studied within this thesis demonstrates their fandom in similar ways visually. For instance, Figure 4 in the appendix demonstrates how Stuckmann, The FlickPick and Andre The Black Nerd prefer their backgrounds to be filled with items to communicate their love of movies. Stuckmann's shelves in particular are often filled with Blu-rays and DVDs of his favorite movies. Furthermore, Stuckmann evidences his position as a fan directly. In his review of *Logan Lucky* (2017), Stuckmann speaks briefly about his excitement for Steven Soderbergh's return to moviemaking. Stuckmann explains

his appreciation for Soderbergh by arguing that 'he approaches films from an auteur perspective, he makes art films' (2017). Moreover, in his *JUSTICE LEAGUE – Movie Review* (2017), Flickinger specifically states that he is a 'fanboy of quality movies' thus confirming my broad interpretation of movie reviewers as fans of cinema, i.e. cinephiles.

Moving on from how film reviewers visually present their fandom to specifically discuss participatory culture, it is important to address YouTube. Henry Jenkins defines 'participatory culture' as a space where 'fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content' (2006: 290). Whilst film reviewers can be viewed as a convergence of the terms 'film fans' and 'cinephiles', the specific subsection of film reviewers that I have identified to investigate within this thesis are also primarily hosted on YouTube. The reviewers studied within this thesis can be viewed as a subsection of YouTubers. A YouTuber can be defined as someone who creates videos and uploads them to YouTube.com. Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier argue that YouTubers are video stars (2009:190) meaning that they are not a huge divergence from previous media stars. The difference between video and film stars, and YouTubers being that they are subject to the megaphone effect, theoretically anyone being able to be a YouTuber. This does make reviewers on YouTube part of a specific culture requiring them to have their own kind of social capital in order to be successful.

As YouTubers, they heavily enforce a focus on their personality as a method of persuasion, rather than their content. However, this is not the only code shared

amongst YouTubers. Included in the appendix are screenshots of each reviewer investigated within this thesis. As evidenced, Jeremy Jahns' scenography is notably the most simplistic, which in turn makes his personality the most important to convey physically. Jahns appears in medium shot against a plain red background, and occasionally images appear in the corner of the screen. The simplicity creates a recognizable uniformity to the videos, which has the added benefit of not needing many (if any) visual effects so as to aid the quick release of these videos. This is especially useful since the primary videos on his YouTube channel are reviews of current movie releases. Over 100 videos are listed in his 2016 movie reviews playlist (two of which are 'best-of' lists and six of which are videos that expand on the original review video and discuss specific spoilers about certain films). The videos are shot in the now ubiquitous 'Vlog' style, meaning that it features numerous jump cuts and there is no complex camera work or movement involved. The simplicity of the review belies its ingenuity. Jahns relies entirely on his own words and gestures to be a source of amusement for the video. Jahns' presence makes his videos transparent and personalized, meaning that by appearing on screen, the audience has a face to match with his opinions, allowing them more opportunity to judge Jahns as a person rather than the written faceless film critic.

As repeatedly drawn attention to, Jahns, like other film reviewers on YouTube, presents himself as an ordinary person talking about films to other ordinary people. His videos are personal and do not speak about the politics of the film, only occasionally and casually referencing the formal techniques on display in the films he discusses. Jahns' image aids this understanding by the audience by

making his personality the focus of the videos. The films that he discusses are *almost* unimportant. The videos focus more on his outgoing nature, his quirky hand gestures and his amusing thoughts on the state of affairs of cinema. Jahns' presence on screen aims to build camaraderie through honesty with his audience. Allowing himself to be seen as a 'normal person' means that he is not a member of the imagined intellectual elite of film critics. Instead he is a fan of film who focuses on the film as a film. Jahns and other reviewers perform their fandom as ordinary persons.

In understanding how film reviewers are YouTubers, it is worth noting that being a YouTuber is not just a hobby, it can be professionalized, with the uploader making money from the videos. A rough estimate on success can be approximated by examining views per video, the number of subscribers and the number of videos uploaded each month. Websites such as Socialblade.com offer rough estimates of how much monthly income a YouTubers' archive generates, but as that website will demonstrate, there is no concrete way to know a YouTuber's earnings without asking the YouTuber in question. The most prolific professional reviewer is Jeremy Jahns, having stated in numerous videos that he gave up his job as a projectionist in a cinema in order to devote himself full time to movie reviewing. Other film reviewers discussed within this thesis are both film reviewers as well as producing other kinds of videos to expand the content and appeal of their channels. Jahns' backstory is one of many that aligns itself with the mythology surrounding YouTube of everyday people becoming successful through the professionalization of their amateurism. Becoming a YouTuber is an achievable goal and a step towards that is through participation

and making connections online. This is not to suggest that the desire for YouTube success is the only reason for participation but can be seen as a potentially contributing factor.

Moreover, YouTube encourages a participatory culture through the comments section and through the ease of video uploading in response to someone's video. Film reviewers specifically ask the audience for feedback at the conclusion of their videos. 'For YouTube, participatory culture is not a gimmick or a sideshow; it is absolutely core business' (Burgess and Green 2013:6) and indeed participatory culture is one that inherently encourages the ordinary person's perspective against those associated with corporate control. In reference to the rise of ordinary persons' online perspective on the news, Graeme Turner writes 'Occasionally, in the new environment, the lack of a professional journalist credential or editorial control is actually presented as a positive – a sign of independence or of a direct connection to the community' (2010: 72). As evidenced by the popularity of film reviewers on YouTube, this can be applied as part of the inherent appeal of film reviewers on YouTube. In regards to YouTubers, Michael Strangelove writes that as 'amateurs who play by the rules', they are able to 'claim the moral high ground' because the YouTube community supports the YouTuber identity (Strangelove 2010: 121). Reviewers are part of a platform that encourages a lack of expertise through the proliferation of the ordinary person narrative, meaning that anyone can participate in discourse.

When addressing my claim that reviewers are accessible to almost anyone, it is necessary to elaborate that there are obvious exemptions to this rule. Writing

in reference to Bourdieu's audience related terms 'disposition' and 'competence', Jancovich et al write 'a particular viewer might simply not care enough about a program to even get to the level of acceptance or rejection, while another may have sufficient investment in its genre' (2003: 5). However, class disparity affects how much information someone can have. So whilst the film reviewer's contributions can be viewed by theoretically anyone, only those with access to the internet will literally be able to view the videos, and potentially those who can afford to frequent the cinema enough for the function of film reviewers to still have meaning. On the other hand, I have referenced previously in this chapter how film reviewers place the focus on themselves and their own opinions. Therefore, the discourse around the videos is not necessarily exclusionary to those who have not watched the films being reviewed.

Additionally, film reviewers tend to create conversation tangentially related to their videos by asking for audience participation on different topics. They also present their audiences views in specific videos, expanding the participation of the viewer from the comments section to the reviewer's videos. Jeremy Jahns has two different video series dedicated to showcasing and responding to his viewers. One is focused on video responses using the Stardust app (a video sharing app for first responses to movie viewings), and the second responding to the comments sections of videos. Whilst Jahns uses these comments section videos to mock rude or inane comments aiding the perception of him as participating with YouTube culture since he takes time in some way to respond to viewers, thus furthering the discourse between producer and viewer. At the end of certain videos, Chris Stuckmann also incorporates his viewers' opinions,

as he does in the *Avengers: Infinity War* – movie review (2018), by including various fan filmed videos of both viewers who have seen the movie and some who are looking forward to the video. A specific example is when a viewer films themselves questioning whether the tonal shifts in the movie will work and Stuckmann attempts to put his fears at ease. Whilst not responding to viewer's thoughts on films he has reviewed, The Black Nerd frequently does question-and-answer videos that allow for viewer participation. Through the film reviewer's presentation of the literal ordinary viewer's opinion, they demonstrate an allegiance to the ordinary person's perspective and offset their position as representatives of the ordinary person, thus reinforcing their place as demotic alternatives to traditional film criticism and encouraging participation.

Furthermore, film reviewers are YouTubers and fan performers; they are defined by their presentation as 'authentic'. Specifically, the YouTuber's inherent aesthetic and style becomes part of the definition of a reviewer through authenticity. The authentic presentation of the self is key to film reviewer's content, which is linked to the concept of reflexivity, a concept that directly applies to video reviewers. Strangelove writes that 'reflexivity describes a state of higher self-awareness or mutual awareness that involves two or more people… Reflexivity expresses the tendency within YouTube to make one's self the subject matter, but it encompasses more than the self as subject' (2011: 74). The performative and subjective aspects of the videos focus the topic of the video on the reviewer and because of the purpose of opinion giving, the opinion of the reviewer on the film. However, mediated authenticity can be seen as a negotiated authentic image between the producer and the viewer. Whilst the genuine

authenticity of the film reviewer is impossible to confirm, Gunn Enli (2015) argues that it is the character on display that the viewer agrees to believe is an authentic image and therefore trustworthy. Additionally, Danah Boyd writes about how 'conventional understandings of how identity is performed often assumes a high degree of individual agency: People convey impressions, and they [impressions] are usually deliberate.' (2007: 142). Film reviewers appear in front of the camera and talk directly to the audience, openly performing a character that is represented as authentic. This direct mode of address is ubiquitous on YouTube and recurring facet within the YouTubers' style generally, and by extension online video reviewers. It ensures that the personality of the reviewer is in some way emphasized in the videos, creating a mediated image of authenticity.

However, despite the film reviewers' attempts to present themselves as authentic and similar to the layperson, this is not a precise way to perceive them. No matter how reviewers define themselves as 'just like you', they are a kind of participant with high social capital on YouTube. Sean Cubitt writes that video improves the audience's media and interpretation skills (1991). Strangelove continues Cubitt's assertion arguing that it is because of these enhanced skills that there is an increased demand for authenticity (Strangelove 2011: 64). Strangelove goes on to posit that the YouTube audience can detect inauthentic creators, which explains the choices made in reviewers' videos. YouTuber's decisions to leave in laughter and line flubs or poor word choices that would usually be removed on television in favor of seeming like an expert.

By leaving in what in television or film would be deemed an imperfection; the reviewer uses their knowledge of the audience (they can be presumed to watch videos on YouTube themselves) to carefully manufacture an image of authenticity. This is also demonstrated through film reviewer's, and YouTubers in general, editing out content that does not aid the specific mediated identity being constructed. Strangelove addresses the authenticity claims by noting that the creator of the NannyCam YouTube channel stated that she edits out the parts of her videos that she doesn't think are important to show, such as removing any negative aspects of her video diaries (Strangelove 2011: 67). As explored through the concept of mediated authenticity, 'we' as an audience on video reviewers cannot know for certain how much of what is presented is truly authentic or not (the word authentic being troublesome at best if not altogether complicated). Strangelove and Enli both emphasize that what is presented is shown through a filter. The YouTube film reviewer defines themselves as ordinary whilst clearly the successful reviewers are capable of manufacturing this claim through their skills in marketing themselves and targeting specific demographics.

Finally, Flickinger is the epitome of a film reviewer's casual demotic tastemaking. Flickinger is different from other reviewers in that he appears to be a bodybuilder of some sort as he is heavily muscled in comparison to other physically unremarkable vloggers. Stylistically, his videos are similar to Jahns'; he quotes and references other movies to demonstrate his own form of knowledge. For example he references the movie *Batman Begins* (2005) in his *Doctor Strange* review (2016), acting out scenes and doing an impersonation of

Christian Bale's Batman, revealing both his affinity for a specific film property and therefore revealing a part of his personality to his audience, mediating an image of authenticity and encouraging participation. However, Flickinger's image is hardly that of the typical nerd so he separates himself from other movie reviewers in his physical presence rather than his content. Whilst Jahns' and Stuckmann are able to speak somewhat coherently, Flickinger's appeal seems to lie in him enjoying himself talking about films and referencing films. Flickinger brings a performative element to the videos by doing impressions and constantly laughing at the conclusion of takes, creating a jovial and laid back atmosphere to his videos.

In this chapter I have argued that analyzing two main aspects can define film reviewers, that being their relation to film criticism, and their facilitation of participatory culture. The definition of a film reviewer on YouTube that is utilized within the context of this thesis, can be summarized thusly: They are fans of film who speaks about contemporary films in YouTube videos. They make no claim of expertise and in fact are open about their lack of expertise. A reviewer defines himself both in style and content against an often imagined form of film criticism (sometimes explicitly but occasionally implicitly) whilst discussing films. They are all YouTubers, meaning that they can be characterized by the codes and conventions on YouTube, most importantly that they encourage participation in their audience. They do this by creating an image of authenticity to persuade the viewer to trust them. Boyd writes that 'unlike everyday embedment, there is no digital corporeality without articulation' (2007: 145). This may explain why reviewers are so popular and defined by themselves in

opposition to film critics so readily. They are clearer and more understood than the written critic. In a world where social networking and the internet is readily taken advantage of by fake users and fraudsters, the corporeal element of film reviewers aids in the trust by a more authenticity aware YouTube audience. This allows the viewer to converse with the creator, an aspect that is expanded upon when they release videos directly responding to viewers and continuing the conversation. They offer their own viewpoints as an alternative to other film critics' work.

Chapter 4: YouTube Film Reviewers and Film Culture

This chapter explores how film reviewers contribute to film culture by facilitating their viewers' immersion into film discourse and culture. Reviewers do this by acting as tastemakers of films (i.e. by initially encouraging and then emphasizing interest in contemporary cinema) and by creating a space for demotic film discourse whilst encouraging its use. The creation of this space and encouragement of its usage is achieved via the development of a trusting relationship between the viewer and the YouTuber. As I have explored in previous chapters, authenticity and trust are essential to the participatory culture of YouTube. In Rob Fugetta's book *Brand Advocates* (a term he coins) he argues that 'the biggest reason Brand Advocates are so powerful is a single five letter word: Trust. Nine of 10 online consumers say recommendations from friends and family members are the most trusted form of advertising worldwide' (Fugetta 2012:10). The same logic can be applied to reviewers' for why trust is essential, the viewer is a form of consumer and therefore, in general is more likely to believe the recommendation of someone they know, like, and, most importantly, trust. I argue that the film reviewer's constructed fan performances (as described in the previous chapter) aims to create a connection to the viewer based on the mediated authentic image. The language and casual tone of the reviewer encourages the audience to feed back to the reviewer.

This chapter is divided into two sections, the first section of this chapter deals with the general creation of a space for demotic film discourse and how the gatekeeping function of film reviewers eases the integration of the audience into

that demotic discourse. The second section utilizes case studies analyzing four separate film reviewers to demonstrate the specifics of my argument. Both textual analyses as well as conversational analyses are performed.

Film Reviewers and Demotic Spheres of Communication

*Whatever you're hoping for, whatever you wanna see, comment below, let me know and as always if you want to see more click right here to see more – (*Jeremy Jahns 2017) *The Mummy – Movie Review*

As established in Chapter 2, film reviewers on YouTube are part of a culture of participation facilitated through their residence on YouTube, since, according to Burgess and Green, 'For YouTube, participatory culture is not a gimmick or a sideshow, it is absolutely core business' (2013: 6). Through their style of contemporary film review, reviewers create a demotic sphere of communication through which the casual filmgoer can easily discuss film. These spheres are digitally embodied by the YouTube comments section underneath each video, which is encouraged by the reviewer for the viewer to frequent. Additionally, the reviewer occasionally encourages the viewer to send in video clips or ask questions to be answered in Question and Answer videos. All these aspects contribute to form a demotic discursive space.

Before beginning my main argument I need to clarify what is specifically meant by a 'sphere of communication', which, within this chapter I use to mean a 'discursive space'. Throughout this chapter, I refer to this discursive space being

created by film reviewers, meaning that they deliberately promote conversation through their videos.

Moreover, in understanding how film reviewers contribute to film culture by creating spaces for demotic film discourse, Henry Jenkins' understanding of participatory culture is essential to this thesis. Jenkins defines participatory culture as one which 'embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices' (2016: 2). Film reviewers are able to encourage the experience of participatory culture through the creation of a discursive space. As mentioned, the comments section allows for viewers to potentially communicate with the reviewer as well as other viewers. The promotion of discussion even on a casual level has the potential to integrate individuals into film culture and further their development. There is also the possibility that they will remain on one level of film culture and never delve deeper but this is not necessarily negative as merely a casual engagement with film reviewers' videos furthers the viability of film reviewer-ship as a career path.

However, I mentioned in the previous chapter that the comments section is not the only method that encourages participation. If the comments section is part of the conversation between film reviewer and audience member then an essential part of that conversation is the response from the reviewer, which furthers the conversation and aids in the creation of a demotic discursive space.

As will be explored in these case studies, both Jeremy Jahns, and Chris Stuckmann include responses from their audiences in their videos, both through recitation and actually showing videos that have been sent in, and The Flick Pick and The Black Nerd both utilize question-and-answer videos to respond to viewer questions. This pseudo correspondance aids the creation of a discursive space that does not always relate directly to film. Regardless, the conversation between the reviewer and audience member has the potential to encourage integration of the viewer further into film culture. This is achieved through the demotic space being opened up by reviewers accepting audience members as valuable to the conversation. As fellow consumers, looking for the most pleasing films, reviewers and their viewers have the potential to converse about film, thus integrating into film culture.

The Authenticity of the Demotic Film Reviewer

Film reviewers encourage participation in the created discursive spaces through the construction of a trustworthy image. Danah Boyd writes that 'unlike everyday embedment, there is no digital corporeality without articulation' (2007: 145). This notion applies to the creation of an online persona. In a world where social networking and the internet is readily taken advantage of by fake users and fraudsters, the corporeal element of film reviewers aids in the trust by a more authenticity aware YouTube audience.

As previously stated, film reviewers on YouTube can be framed as fan performers and fan critics. The average consumer is barely involved in textual production other than 'fleeting' texts that are (in conversation) 'not written

down' (Abercrome & Longhurst 1998: 149). By contrast, fans 'produce something material' which in this case is the review videos they produce that 'can be passed on to others' (Abercrome & Longhurst 1998: 149). The performative aspect of reviewers helps to construct the individual identity of reviewers, simultaneously negotiating the legitimacy of the opinions being communicated through the videos, seeking to persuade viewers of the values of judgments through the performance of those judgments. This image is utilized to authenticate the sphere of communication created through the reviewer's videos and practices. Put simply, the reviewer's presentation of a mediated identity enables and encourages audiences to interact with the text. The mediated authenticity of the reviewer attracts the viewer into film discourse because the reviewer presents himself or herself as the archetypical viewer. The participatory nature of film reviewers' practices is enhanced by this perceived authenticity as it encourages dialogue between film reviewer and viewer.

Gunn Enli writes about negotiated authenticity, arguing that 'the media are normatively supposed to provide the people with trustworthy, balanced, and neutral information about the world' however, 'mediated authenticity is constructed by authenticity illusions, such as the enhancement of raw material through adjustments that make it seem more realistic, genuine, and trustworthy' (Enli 2015: 3, 132). Here, Enli argues that the producer creates a version of reality that the viewer complicity understands to be a representation of reality, rather than reality itself. This 'mediated communication is a process practiced by media professionals, such as movie producers and news editors, as well as amateurs, such as bloggers and social media users' and 'a negotiation between

producers and audiences is crucial to the success of the communication' (Enli 2015: 131). Enli's work helps to explain that the authentic image of the film reviewer is utilized to appeal to viewers so that they are more accepting of the opinions produced and, ultimately, more likely to contribute to film discourse. The actual authenticity of the reviewers is unimportant. Instead, what remains essential to their popularity and indeed the creation of a communicative demotic sphere is the perceived authenticity of the reviewer. Through analysis of the language and conventions of film reviewers, which I will perform later in this chapter, the method of how they convey an image of authenticity and thus encourage participation within a more demotic sphere of communication becomes clear.

Video Reviewers as Gateway Discourse

In the previous chapter, film fans and cinephiles were conflated as terms. Moreover, as aforementioned, Jenkins has his own term for critically minded fans that he calls 'fan critics' (1992). Jenkins' classification refers to members of specific fandoms whereas the broader fans of film are understood in a different way. Whilst film reviewers conform to Jenkins' statement that 'fans tend to see themselves in highly individualistic terms, emphasizing their refusal to conform to the mundane: social norms' (1992: 85), they do not conform to the practices Jenkins outlines such as speculating on and filling gaps in the narrative logic of the specific television show or movie they are a fan of. However, reviewers are very clearly still defined as fans and can be perceived as fan performers. In being viewed this way, the reductive style demotic discourse (presenting simple and isolated views on film), which they provide can be seen as a low level fan

performance that has the potential to act as an entryway to different levels of discourse. The previous contribution noted in this chapter related to specifically encouraging a demotic space, this contribution relates to the integration into film culture itself. The contribution discussed here relates to the potential introduction of the individual into film culture, as well as a gateway to expanding interests and involvement into film culture.

Within this section, it is important to note the positive aspects of accessibility that have come as a result of the contributions being made to film culture. The contribution discussed is directly related to the 'gateway drug' aspect of film reviewers. As such, the accessible language many reviewers use helps their viewers gain a foothold in popular film culture

Chris Stuckmann's development on YouTube is a first hand representation of a progressing immersion into film culture. From observing his older videos where his format is more akin to The Flick Pick with malapropisms and stammered sentences without a clear structure, he has developed to a point of utilizing professionalized language in his videos, albeit somewhat sparingly. Stuckmann as a reviewer has undergone a transformation that his viewers could also undergo. He has integrated further into film culture and contributes to that film discourse by developing his conversation with viewers further. As explored within the later case studies, he remains accessible, but introduces the viewer to less agreeable opinions and more cinematic terminology than Jahns or Flickinger.

Looking at the specificities of film review videos, both Jeremy Jahns and Andre "Black Nerd" demonstrate mannerisms that have the potential to develop the viewing practices of the audience. For example, in his *Transformers: Last Knight – movie review* (2017) Jahns talks about how he was previously a projectionist so specific details like aspect ratios bother him. He states that this may be a complaint specific to him. Instead of keeping his comments broad and discussing how they make him feel, by admitting this Jahns demonstrates professional and informed knowledge. Through the video, he admits that it is not necessarily an important part of the film but clearly demonstrates knowledge and an informed opinion that is by his own admission, not part of what his audience prioritizes when watching films. This small introduction into professional experience changing the viewing experience presents a microcosm of how film critics work and potentially begins a process of breaking down boundaries to allow the viewer to integrate deeper into film culture.

Additionally, Andre 'Black Nerd' introduces viewers to a casual way of discussing film that would be simple to develop further. In his '*CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS MOVIE REVIEW – A Good Superhero Movie??' [Black Nerd]* (2017), he describes the animation's style as 'fun' and argues that because an animation company with an identifiably different style from mainstream animation companies was used, the movie looks different and stands out. Andre has demonstrated a number of traits in this extract that could encourage viewers to change their viewing practices, giving unusual animation styles the opportunity to impress them (as well as enjoying children's films) and potentially integrate themselves further into film culture. The reviewer, whilst not developing his

comments in particular depth, does do research to evidence his opinion. This small level of research is a practice that has the potential to set an example for the viewer. They are encouraged to research film production information to inform their opinion whilst not being alienating by the reviewer.

Finally, film reviewers' very existence and the appropriation of film technical terms or occasionally academic language means that the viewer is immersed within film culture. The reviewer encourages the viewer to discuss films with both the reviewer and others in the comments section. This inherently results in the viewer becoming integrated into film culture. Through this, it is possible to integrate further, much like Stuckmann demonstrates. Existence as a viewer of film reviewer's is potentially a gateway to more challenging and informed film discourse. Jahns limits his discussion whereas Stuckmann provides the audience with more technical language and integrates them further into specialized film discourse i.e. by discussing aspect ratios and production companies. Additionally, the general popularity of the film reviewers discussed here indicates an appreciation by the audience, therefore it can be assumed that the reviewers' practices have the potential to impact the viewing practices of a large audience, introducing them into film culture.

This section explores four case studies of film reviewers in order to demonstrate how film reviewers contribute to film culture by creating a demotic sphere of communication and then encouraging its usage so as to allow integration into film culture. I examine the film reviewers that I have been referring to throughout this thesis, namely Jeremy Jahns, Chris Stuckmann, John Flickinger (The Flick Pick), and Andre 'The Black Nerd'.

Jeremy Jahns

As of May 1st 2018 Jeremy Jahns has released over 1380 videos, his channel having been created on March 7th 2007 in the USA. He is the typical example of a film reviewer. He produces content more regularly than any other reviewer in this chapter and has over 1.4 million subscribers. Throughout Jahns's videos he covers topics that could be understood by the casual filmgoer with the same level of knowledge as that presented by the reviewer. This functions to create a demotic space for film discourse. He focuses on plot initially, giving a brief summary in a colloquial manner. In the review of *Snatched* (2017) he summarizes the plot thusly: 'after she gets dumped by her boyfriend, her and her mom, played by Goldie Hawn, go to this exotic vacation in South America. and then they get kidnapped by these scumbags, they get out of it and now they have to escape and… that's the movie'. Jahns is careful to avoid giving away any specific plot details, as revealing spoilers often draws ire on the Internet. It also ensures a standard is set by the video creator for the audience. By not spoiling the film, he fosters an attitude for his audience to do the same in their discourse.

Generally Jahns moves on to discuss the specific star quality (if there is one) of the film that has caught Jahns' attention. For instance he discusses that he has no strong feelings for Amy Schumer in *Snatched* and that he approves of the work of Guy Ritchie both prior to and specifically in regards to *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (2017). This clear attempt at authenticity allows Jahns to disclose his fandom to the audience. Additionally, the discussion demonstrates Jahns' awareness of the star system, even mocking it in his *The Shallows – Movie Review* as he claims that for a while actress Blake Lively was being 'shoved down our throats' (2017), demonstrating a passable understanding of the ways that popular stars are used to sell films.

Jahns constructs an authentic image of himself by defining himself against film critics and experts, constructing an identity as an ordinary person, an amateur in the field. In his *Hail, Caesar! – movie review* (2016) video, he defines himself against 'super film aficionados' who know everything about Hollywood history, arguing that a movie like *The Hateful Eight* is a 'super cool movie' whilst also being a 'love letter' to a different genre of film'. He states that by comparison, *Hail, Caesar* is not a good enough movie outside of its 'love letter status' because he does not know everything about Hollywood and therefore cannot appreciate the film. Jahns is direct in addressing when a movie's 'artsy' status actually means that it is 'boring in quite a few scenes' to the general viewer, as he states in *The Witch – movie review* (2016). So, as demonstrated, Jahns establishes that his interests align with the (assumed) average viewer or one who has little tolerance for slow paced films or characteristics outside of the Hollywood mainstream. This viewer can be assumed to not know intimate details of

Hollywood and, speaking more speculatively, to care about the artistic integrity of films because they are looking primarily to be thrilled and entertained (like Jahns).

The main focus of Jahns' reviews, however, is on the content of the film, whether it be the world of *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, being 'so magical it's crazy' (2017) or the comedy in *Snatched* that 'made me laugh but the laughter never really came from the main characters on screen' (2017). Jahns language here is of particular importance both because of how conversational it is – key to the discursive space remaining demotic – but also because of how Jahns avoids elaboration or specificity. This allows the discursive space in the comments section of YouTube to be accessible to all. Additionally, it is worth noting, that Jahns does pay some attention to the specifically cinematic elements of film upon occasion. In both his *Snatched* and *King Arthur* videos (2017) he briefly mentions the choppy editing which affects the flow of the movie. Therefore, as shown, Jahns encourages discussion that is accessible to all. Instead of using a host of technical terms or complex language, Jahns' videos focus on the obvious elements that do not require great insight (for example, he does not attempt to analyze mise-en-scene). This allows for maximum discussion because viewers may discuss the content of the video on equal footing with the film reviewer.

In addition, Jahns releases specific videos that respond directly to negative (or occasionally humorous) comments. Whilst they sometimes have a mocking tone, Jahns' response to comments by mocking his viewers furthers the demotic and friendly atmosphere around his videos. Jahns is not above mocking his

viewership and theoretically costing himself views, instead he allows a friendly atmosphere to grow, one where both viewer and reviewer are comfortable speaking to one another as friends and equals.

Finally, the most obvious sign that Jahns himself is creating a space for film discourse is in his sign off, which specifically addresses the audience and encourages them to discuss films with him. Jahns' specific sign off is the one quoted at the beginning of this section and it works to place the viewer on the same level as the reviewer. He is as eager to understand the thoughts of the audience, the conversational capabilities of YouTube working to legitimize film discourse as general conversation, allowing the general public to participate in film culture in a way previously only held by film critics.

Additionally, Jahns uses language that is immediately understandable to an uneducated or general audience. He repeatedly compliments movies being 'a lot of fun' (*Suicide Squad – movie review* 2016) without the need for elaboration. This lack of specificity is immediately understandable to an audience without the tools to articulate themselves more precisely and is thus conducive to the creation of a demotic sphere of communication around the film reviews. Jahns' popularity on the platform demonstrates an appetite for a short form, spoken and 'performed' piece of film discourse that does not intellectualize films. Jahns' opinions are easily understood and not explored in depth and can be seen as an attempt to show allegiance to an imagined community (Anderson 1983).

A defining feature of Jahns is his candor and lack of pretension and his recommendation scale completes this depiction. The colloquial aspect of this grading system is potentially accessible to the layman, and is more light-hearted than a numerical or star rating system. As stated in his *47 Meters Down* video, Jahns argues that he does not have a 'ratings system' per say, he just has 'factual phrases' that are relaying how he would actually watch a movie (2017). Despite his protestations, this thesis continues to call his features a ratings system. His ratings system encourages viewers to watch movies in ways that befit the film. According to Jahns, a terrible film can still be attended 'only if you're drunk', or perhaps is worth 'buying on Blu ray'. His other ratings consist of warnings like 'you won't remember this in T-minus one day'. These more conversational ratings system expand the conversational nature of his reviews and allow for the viewer to have another conversation within the comments section. When Jahns utilizes these systems at the conclusion of the videos he encourages discussion, he has implicitly challenged the viewer to describe how they watched the film.

The introduction of humor into the ratings system itself aids in the production of Jahns' authentic image as Jahns is honest about how he would actually watch movies (not always respectfully) thus fostering a casual atmosphere of demotic discourse by the videos. Maurice Charland argues that identification precedes persuasion (1987:133-134) as through rhetoric, the boundary is defined between who is included and excluded in a group. The reviewer being part of the same group as the audience ties into authenticity as well as fan identity. The reviewers create a mirrored image of their audience through themselves. They

are authentic fans who construct an image of themselves as trustworthy so that their reviews are more appreciated and more easily digested.

Jahns' trustworthiness and direct calls for responses from his viewers invites the audience to participate within the discursive space around Jahns' videos. Additionally, as I have documented in the previous chapter Jahns responds to his viewers in multiple ways. He responds to viewers both through occasional utilization of the Stardust app, which he uses to show his viewers' opinions on films (they film themselves reacting to a film), and his videos that respond to his viewers' more negative comments. Jahns' utilization of his audience's thoughts and opinions as content directly incorporates them both into film culture and into his business. The *Stardust Reactions & Reviews* videos are perceived as a prize by the viewer for they are able to participate within the conversation directly with Jahns, whereas the *Tales from the comments section* video responses are often mocking in tone. Whilst previously it has been acknowledged that these videos potentially aid the viewer in participation. However, it is worth acknowledging that Jahns can be viewed as elevating himself above his viewers. It is perfectly viable to view Jahns' incorporation of response as a symptomatic of taking advantage of the flattened social structure. But this could also be interpreted as Jahns demonstrating a difference between a viewer and a critic. It is his questions that they respond to. Jahns facilitates the conversation but also steers it.

These methods are effective in engaging the viewer and bringing them into the discursive space and demonstrating the appropriate frame of mind to bring

into the conversation. During his video *Tales from The Comment Section – My Rating System Explained* (2018), Jahns does address some positive comments, such as one commenter stating that his videos are 'always getting better and better', telling the viewer that he is always looking to improve his channel, which is why he has started the comment section videos. The epitome of my point is demonstrated here as Jahns has a brief conversation with the viewer, explaining his reasoning for the video's existence and alleviating fears that his content will stagnate. In short, Jahns ensures that the viewer is included in his content whilst also defining himself as a producer. Primarily Jahns is a gatekeeper of film but he has now expanded his role to more directly include audience participation within the discursive space he creates.

Chris Stuckmann

Chris Stuckmann created his YouTube channel on January 6th 2011 and has over 1.2 million subscribers on YouTube as of May 1st 2018, he has released over 1200 videos. Aside from a more formal plot recap, and the setting of Stuckmann's videos (his videos are in a room in Stuckmann's house that is filled with dvds and geek ephemera such as *DragonBall Z* models), Stuckmann does not diverge from Jahns' style in many ways, meaning that the same points can be applied to him. However, there are distinct qualities of Stuckmann's videos that are worth mentioning; for instance, in his videos, Stuckmann addresses intent upon occasion, noting that *Baywatch* (2017) should not be critiqued the same way as other films because 'it's dumb, but they know it, they embrace it' (2017). He contends that 'it's really bad but it's trying to be really bad', and cites the source material as the reason that 'for fucks sake, where else are you gonna go' in

regards to the perceived stupidity of the film. Stuckmann here allows the viewer to relax about liking or disliking the film, allowing for a calm and friendly discussion to be had. Of course this "discussion" is Stuckmann talking directly to the camera, but he speaks as if offering a conversation, utilizing second person address and answering questions from viewers. Regardless, by arguing that the film's intent is to be stupid, he nullifies the argument that the film is bad, thus alleviating the need for any further discussion on this topic. By ending the need for expansion, Stuckmann create a space for viewers who enjoy the movie and provides an explanation for why angrily arguing in the comments' section about why someone liked the film is fruitless.

Moreover, Stuckmann addresses topics such as genre speaking about them in such a way that can be easily accessible and understand to an audience unfamiliar with specific film jargon He does this when he begins speaking about *Free Fire* (2017), stating that:

> I was expecting it to be a fun action film that had doses of fun but was more focused on action… Having seen it, this is almost like a slapstick comedy. It's not a full comedy, it's not y'know, Lesley Neilson or Mr Bean or something. It's just there's quite a lot more quipping and a lot more fun to be had in this movie than I expected. In some ways that's a detriment to this film, and in some ways it's actually quite enjoyable..

Here, Stuckmann expands his discussion in more detail than Jahns, but continues to frame his criticisms within a colloquial tone. In his *Baywatch – movie review*

(2017) he argues that the editing is 'really annoying' because 'you can't see what's going on'. When discussing *Alien: Covenant* he encourages the viewer not to dismiss the film, because of 'how much work really goes in to making a film this beautiful' (2017) but does not allow his appreciation of the aesthetic of the film to distract from his criticism regarding the third act of the film. The viewer is presumed to have some understanding that when Stuckmann refers to the third act, he is referring to the ending section of the film. It is not important to the content of the video that Stuckmann attempts to impart knowledge on the structure of film, instead what is important is the encouragement of the integration of technical language into the colloquial lexicon. Through this, the demotic discursive space is encouraged to use language like 'third act', appropriating it for general use despite the meaning not being clarified. Notably, Stuckmann lures in viewers, tempting them to comment and discuss with his relative vagaries. When reviewing *Alien: Covenant* he casually mentions that the film 'has a lot to say' without exploring explicitly what he means. This rhetorical device can be seen as a talking point for discussion around the video. He also entices his viewers to see the film, regardless of his grading of the movie, hinting that there is a storyline not shown in the advertising for the film that he was surprised by and that he wants the viewer to be surprised by as well.

The ending of videos often encourages participation and establishes that the viewer is as important to the larger film discourse as the reviewer. Stuckmann has his own sign off where, unlike Jahns' ending, he does not directly encourage participation. His sign off only relates to the watching of more of his videos - 'Guys thank you so much for watching, if you like this, click right here and get

Stuckmannised'. This sign off from the video does correlate more to Stuckmann's confusing identity as a film reviewer with elements of a traditional film critic. However, the format and content of his videos still encourages participation and the comments section of his videos is evidence of this, as it is heavily utilized. This is due to Stuckmann being much more open about his likes and dislikes that Jahns is. Stuckmann's background is littered with pop culture ephemera and blue rays that have the potential to inspire discussion from the viewer.

As previously noted, whilst Jahns presents himself specifically as being an amateur and not an experts, Stuckmann is able to express himself with more finesse, bringing in brief historical context and knowledge of various franchises to demonstrate his more professional attitude. Stuckmann's identity construction is different to Jahns' but equally as 'authentic'. He speaks honestly about his personal life in certain videos, breaking from his review to explain something to the audience, such as when he addresses his new tattoo as a reason for why he has only seen one film that week (*Death Note – Movie Review* 2017). Moreover, in place of Jahns' ratings system, Stuckmann grades movies on an alphabetical system.. The grading system informs the viewer that he is systematic in his approach to grading films. It is also a familiar system that has wide usage, familiarity with this system is key to trusting Stuckmann's judgments. Despite this, Stuckmann still leaves in jump cuts, cutaway jokes to the audience, like in his *Transformers: Age of Extinction – Movie Review* video, humorously explaining his joke and (within the same review) does impressions of the film to make fun of it. All of this adds to the laid back and authentic image of Stuckmann.

Stuckmann's personality is so essential to his videos that when he attempts different kind of videos, the participation from the viewer becomes focused on the deviations from the vlog style. In the comments section of his *Isle of Dogs – movie review* (2018) video there are comments addressing that this video is 'a bit scripted and impersonal' because Stuckmann is not talking directly to the camera and has instead experimented with a video style where he gives his review in voice only, with the trailer for the reviewed movie playing in the background. Comments like this demonstrate my point that the mediated authenticity of his personality is important to the viewer. Viewers such as this one this prefer Stuckmann being unscripted and talking to them because it allows them to trust him more. Further comments criticize Chris, with statements like they 'really prefer' him 'on camera' because videos that do not feature him personally addressing the camera are 'lifeless'. The commenter in question notes that Stuckmann's personality 'is why I most enjoy your reviews', warning Stuckmann 'don't forget that'. The participation from the viewers focuses on Stuckmann's personality because that is how viewers get involved in film discourse. Commenters like this demonstrate the desire for a flattened social structure that vlogging provides so that they can join in on a discussion with a personality they like, rather than a faceless critic.

Andre 'the Black Nerd'

Andre 'Black Nerd' has uploaded over 1100 videos since July 10th 2007 when his channel was created and has over 650000 subscribers as of May 1st 2018. Andre is by far the most enthusiastic performer of the reviewers studied in this

thesis, constantly smiling and laughing, encouraging a jovial attitude amongst his viewers. His identity is performed as an individual who focuses on the positive aspects of film. Additionally, Andre's language encourages friendly participation within the demotic space around the videos. He is laid back and friendly, littering his speech with contractions like 'y'all' that demonstrate how he is having a conversation with the viewer about his opinion, rather than lecturing them on film. When discussing negative aspects of a film, Andre focuses on what he enjoyed primarily and uses the things he disliked almost as a side note. In his review of *Rampage* (2018) he notes 'Rampage is dumb', he is careful to state that he 'enjoyed it but mark my words, it's dumb'. He mocks expectations by arguing that the very source material is silly but enjoyable. These relatively balanced judgments encourage the viewer to participate within the discourse because there are no negative ramifications to participation. Because Andre can enjoy a movie whilst discussing its more negative aspects, the viewer is encouraged to take the same attitude when discussing film.

Andre sets the tone of his videos immediately by opening his movie reviews with the phrase 'I'm a give you the good, I'm a give you the bad, I'm a give you the nerdy'. Andre openly states that he is a nerd and by extension creates a space for similar identifying nerdy viewers to participate in the discourse. His backgrounds are often filled with geek ephemera such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Toys, proudly announcing that he is a fan of various pop culture properties. Andre also defines himself as different to other reviewers by releasing multiple kinds of videos in addition to his regular movie reviews. For example, he has a vlog video of going to Florida to experience a *Ready Player One* (2018) themed

attraction. Despite the disclaimer that the video has a sponsor (the experience was paid for by Warner Bros. studio), the video helps to emphasize that Andre is an ordinary viewer who is excited for a movie. He may have an experience that ordinary film viewers will not be given but his reactions are similar to that of the layman. This helps the discursive space that he creates to remain demotic. Furthermore, the transparent advertising reinforces Andre's position as a consumer. Andre evaluates film by what is going to be pleasing to people and then uses his position as a critical consumer and geek to make his opinions more valuable to like minded viewers.

Moreover, Andre creates a space for demotic discourse when he ends videos. He asks what viewers thought of the movie if they've seen it, and if they haven't he asks if they're going to watch the movie. Much like other reviewers, having seen the film that is being reviewed is not needed to enjoy the video. But perhaps more importantly, if the viewer has seen the movie, they are rewarded with more ways to participate. Furthermore, Andre answers questions that the viewer has by releasing Question and Answer videos, extending the conversation from the comments section back into the content of the reviewer. The extension of the conversation encourages repeated participation within the demotic discursive space because the conversation is allowed to continue. Instead of viewers ending the conversation after the video has concluded and hoping that their comments get noticed, viewers have the opportunity to see the reviewer respond directly to them, potentially in live streaming format. The direct notice by a reviewer is evidenced when Andre gives shout outs to specific viewers in his *Live Q&A!* video.

Before moving on to the next case study, it is worth mentioning that Andre is the only black reviewer who fulfills the specifications for reviewers studied in this thesis. As such, he occupies a slightly different space to the other reviewers. For instance, Andre occasionally references race of characters in reference to his own race, a characteristic that the other reviewers avoid because it would inject a political opinion into their accessible content. Whilst it is not the focus to explore the impact of his race within this thesis, it is worth noting that there is a potential impact on viewers of who observe a reviewer that dabbles in critical race theory.

John 'The Flick Pick' Flickinger

Finally, although similar to the other reviewers, enough elements of Flickinger are distinctive enough to warrant analysis. Flickinger has over 250,000 subscribers and has released 566 videos since October 8th 2010. Like other reviewers, Flickinger is conversational in his videos. He opens his review of *The Mummy* (2017) by jokingly stating that 'Tom Cruise runs away from an ancient Princess Mummy… for two hours'. Flickinger is calm, laid back and keeps the level of discussion in his videos accessible. He prioritizes jokes and the entertainment function of his videos rather than a detailed discussion, like other film reviewers on YouTube. Sentences like the prior quote quickly get across Flickinger's level of interest in the film he is discussing, mocking the simplicity of the plot and inherently dismissing the film. It also functions as a relatively spoiler free recap of the movie's plot – an essential component to any review. In his video review of *The Mummy,* Flickinger states that the scene he is talking

about is in all the trailers, allowing the discursive space to remain safe from spoilers for those who have or have not seen the film being reviewed. Flickinger's conversational structure to his videos is more akin to a stream of consciousness approach to writing.

Flickinger demonstrates his personal interests through presenting the audience with his personal fandoms. In his review of *The Mummy*, Flickinger mocks the movie for attempting to establish a Marvelesque cinematic universe (i.e. one where characters within a franchise exist in the same universe and can feature in one another's films), implicitly arguing that the characters in the film do not have the same cultural currency as Marvel's comic book heroes (although he by no means uses the terminology 'cultural currency'). Flickinger admits his love of the Marvel films and comics meaning that, much like Jahns, Flickinger is open about which various fandoms he is part of and what his pop culture interests are, claiming that he is the man he is today because of Tom Cruise's underwear dance scene in *Risky Business* (1983) before jokingly telling the audience 'not to ask questions' about it (2017). Flickinger's openness, and humorous deflection, about his love of certain films creates a tone for the conversation between himself and viewers. The discourse that takes place around the video is more likely to be accessible for casual movie fans.

Flickinger concludes his videos not only asking about the audience's opinion of the film but also by asking a different question related to the film that has been reviewed. For example, in his review video of *The Mummy*, Flickinger asks: 'What

did you think about this movie? Or what is your favorite monster movie of all time?' Much like with Jahns' content, having seen the movie is not necessary to enjoy the review allowing the discursive space created by the video to remain accessible to potentially anyone. Lies Van de Vijver writes about how the cinema needs to be considered a 'habitual socialized experience' (2017: 142). Considering cinema as a socialized experience tangentially fits with the reviewers' approach to films. Reviewers (and Flickinger specifically) discuss films in a watercooleresque way, emphasizing a more casual approach to watching films and depending on the film, they encourage the audience to see films that they recommend at the cinema because the experience of watching the film is worth it.

Finally, John Flickinger releases Question and Answer videos. These allow him to extend the relationship between viewer and reviewer from the recommendation function of videos, into a more personal relationship. In all of these question and answer videos, the reviewer specifically talks about aspects of his life that are not related to movies or television. This furthers the construction of a discursive space both by continuing the conversation between viewer and producer and by allowing the viewer to see that they have an impact on the producer. The viewer does not exist below the reviewer. As mentioned in prior chapters, Danah Boyd (2007) writes about Friendster and how as a social network it flattens social structures. The flattened social structure is a useful way of understanding the relationship between the audience and YouTube film reviewers and how they can be defined. Their primary function is as a recommendation system akin to film critics in the past. However, they differ

from print critics by taking advantage of the flattened social structure that YouTube creates within its participatory culture. There are fewer barriers to communication and a system in place that rewards the reviewer if interaction from their audience is high. The focus on interaction also means that the reviewer is again rewarded with higher interactivity if they present themselves as authentic persons who are therefore trustworthy.

Conclusion

The aim of this work has been to illuminate an aspect of the changing landscape of film criticism. Broadly redefining film criticism as a banner term under which newer forms of criticism can fit under allows the studying of the variant film critics like film reviewers to be more easily contextualized. More specifically, this work has aimed to understand what I have defined as film reviewers and their demotic approach to film discourse on YouTube. The existence of the film reviewer must have benefits, and this thesis has argued this takes the form of opening a demotic pathway for the layperson to more easily integrate into film culture.

Whilst film reviewers' works are often reductive, the entertaining nature of the reviewer video creates the opportunity for education to be positively associated with colloquial fun. This has the potential for many positive effects to occur across film discourse and culture. There are three main effects that have the potential to be observed as a result of film reviewer's domination of online film discourse on YouTube; the first being the redefinition of the image of a critic. As stated in Chapter Two, there is a recurring image of a film critic utilized across media, that being a shortsighted and elitist intellectual. The film reviewer rejects that image in favour of a more upbeat personality – akin to that of a television presenter. To more positively associate the individuals reviewing movies may have implications across how criticism is perceived. Whilst it is unwise to speculate on the positive or negative developments this may take, it seems likely that considering the popularity of film reviewers, that they will be presented in a

positive light, perhaps encouraging their usage and contributing to the development the field or film reviewing into a career path.

Secondly, by opening a pathway for the layperson to immerse themselves into film culture, the general public is generally being encouraged to watch more films. Since the film reviewer does not gate keep films as much as they act as tastemakers, seeing the film that is being reviewed often allows the viewer to partake in more in depth conversation about the film. They are not punished for having seen the film because they can actually converse with the film reviewer.

Finally, a speculative but anecdotally true consequence of film reviewers opening of a demotic pathway is that the layperson has more opportunity to progress their intellectual development. Since film reviewers encourage discussion so often, conflicting opinions are inevitable in the ensuing discourse. Developmentally this has the potential to trigger intellectual change in individuals more than never discussing film. The primary example that I have stated previously is Chris Stuckmann, who clearly follows a path of intellectual development across the videos on his channel.

Unfortunately, this research is inherently limited for a variety of factors. Whilst the film reviewer uses their mediated image to appear as authentic and trustworthy and this thesis analyses the most popular film reviewers that fit under this definition. This research was limited by the relatively precise definition of a film reviewer within this thesis; there were a limited number of individuals who were analyzable. To overcome this, one would have to ignore

the subscriber count qualification of 100,000 and expand outwards. However, this brings me to another limitation of the current research; the variations of a film reviewer. Much like how film reviewers are theorized as a form of film critic, there are variations on the film reviewer that fulfill the same function but vary in terms of form and presentation. YouTubers like *Nostalgia Critic* or *CinemaSins* give variations on film reviews but are different enough to warrant further exploration.

Additionally, there are aspects of this research that can be developed in more depth in future research. For example, there was not enough space in this thesis to analyse the implications of the majority of film reviewers being male. More research could be undertaken on how this reflects on the landscape of film criticism or on online fandoms. Alternatively, whilst it was addressed to a small extent, Andre 'the Black Nerd' is the only African-American film reviewer with a large following, and there was not the space within this thesis to analyse what this means or how Andre presents himself significantly differently. Furthermore, upon reflection, if expanding on this thesis in future research, there is the potential to perform more statistically analyses in order to fully construct a definition of what film criticism is in the contemporary age so as to properly understand the mass of film gatekeepers and tastemakers online. Furthermore when improving future research, comparing different kinds of critics' reviewers of the same movies would be useful. When researching the difference in readability, it became clear that critics often review a different set of films to reviewers, perhaps because the reviewer presents a more populist perspective. And finally, speaking of populism, there is an argument to be made that film

reviewers represent not only a demotic shift but a populist shift. This has the potential to be a more politically charged thesis question relevant to the current Brexit and Trump centered times.

Finally, through this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that there are important aspects of to film reviewers that deserve to be studied and understood. The death of film criticism has and most likely never will occur. Given the opportunity, there will always be disagreement amongst individuals, especially in relation to art. This is what drives film criticism to new forms, developing across different platforms and finding new audiences.

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Appendix

Figure 1:
The Predominant Image of the Critic

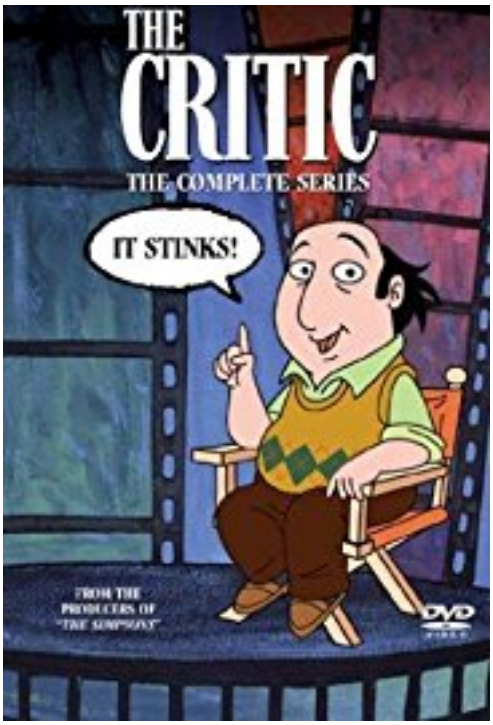






Figure 2:
Vlogs







Figure 3: Statistics

	Jahns			Stuckmann			Black Nerd			Flickinger		
	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability Grade	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability Grade	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability Grade	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability Grade
1	3.7	81.2	A	3.8	80.4	A	3	86.8	A	3.2	84.8	A
2	3.2	85.2	A	3.6	81.8	A	2.8	88.6	A	3.3	84.7	A
3	3.2	85.1	A	3.7	81.2	A	2.9	87.3	A	3.2	85.1	A
4	3.2	84.8	A	3.4	83.4	A	3	86.9	A	3.2	84.9	A
5	3.5	82.7	A	5.2	69.5	A	3.7	81.2	A	3	86.5	A
	3.36	83.8		3.94	79.26		3.08	86.16		3.18	85.2	

Jahns videos Fahrenheit, Game Night, Solo: A Star Wars Story, Deadpool 2, Avengers Infinity War

Stuckmann video: Solo, Book Club, Avengers Infinity War, Deadpool 2, Isle of Dogs

Nerd: Deadpool 2, Infinity War, Rampage, Ready Player One, Pacific Rim Uprising

Flickinger: Rampage, REadyPLayer One, Tomb Raider, Black Panther, Fifty Shades Freed

	FilmcritHulk			MovieBob			Amy Nicholson			Armond White		
	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability	Flesch-Kincaid Grade	Flesch Reading Ease	Readability
1	11.8	56.9	D	12.3	52	D	18.2	34.4	E	17.1	27.1	E
2	7.5	67.2	B	15	46.9	E	9.4	59	B	14.9	30.9	E
3	8.7	65.3	B	11.6	60.4	D	10.6	51.5	C	13.9	37.5	D
4	8.8	66.3	B	9.6	60.2	B	9.6	64.1	C	15.3	27.9	E
5	8.2	65.7	B	11.1	56.2	C	9.4	56.4	B	15.5	25.6	E
	9	64.28		11.92	55.14		11.44	53.08		15.34	29.8	

Table Analyze	Flesch-Kincaid Grade
Column B	Critics
vs.	vs.
Column A	Reviewers
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0286
Exact or appro	Exact
P value summ	*
Significantly di	Yes
One- or two-ta	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks i	10 , 26
Mann-Whitney	0
Difference between medians	
Median of colu	3.27, n=4
Median of colu	11.68, n=4
Difference: Act	8.41
Difference: Ho	8.31

Table Analyze	Flesch Reading Ease
Column B	Critics
vs.	vs.
Column A	Reviewers
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0286
Exact or appro	Exact
P value summ	*
Significantly di	Yes
One- or two-ta	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks i	26 , 10
Mann-Whitney	0
Difference between medians	
Median of colu	84.5, n=4
Median of colu	54.11, n=4
Difference: Act	-30.39
Difference: Ho	-30.39

Table Analyze	Readability
Column B	Critics
vs.	vs.
Column A	Reviewers
Mann Whitney test	
P value	0.0286
Exact or appro	Exact
P value summ	*
Significantly di	Yes
One- or two-ta	Two-tailed
Sum of ranks i	10 , 26
Mann-Whitney	0
Difference between medians	
Median of colu	1, n=4
Median of colu	3.3, n=4
Difference: Act	2.3
Difference: Ho	2.3

Figure 4:






THE FORCE AWAKENS
DIE HARD
MATRIX