POST-INDUSTRIAL CULTURAL CRITICISM
The everyday amateur expert and the online cultural public sphere

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Integrating perspectives from research into cultural and post-industrial journalism, this article presents a pilot study of websites with reviews of arts and culture conducted by amateurs. Such websites constitute a popular space for cultural criticism, and one that challenges traditional hierarchies within journalism. The article maps which Danish websites conduct arts and culture reviews, asks what features these websites have that facilitate public discourse, and measures the actual discussion on the websites. While academic diagnoses of the state of the online public sphere have generally been discouraging, this article argues that this is partly due to a strong focus on politics rather than on culture and illustrates how the cultural public sphere of online reviews constitutes a heterogeneous space for a public discussion about arts and culture. Furthermore, it shows that some amateur reviewers have highly specialized knowledge of culture and, on that basis, argues that the emergence of this type of critic might represent a qualitative strengthening of cultural criticism.

Introduction

As digitalization impacts institutions and practices all across society, scholars and practitioners agree that within the field of journalism, the potential of ordinary people producing, publishing, and distributing media content is one of the most important developments to follow from the emergence of digital, networked technology. It has almost become a cliché to point out that "the people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006) are no longer "passive" recipients of media content but rather active agents in its production, and rich studies have theorized and scrutinized this dimension of current media (see, among many others, Boczkowski 2004; Deuze 2003; Larsson 2012; Russell 2011; Singer et al. 2011).

One dimension of this development, however, seems to remain somewhat unnoticed by the research community, namely that amateurs and actors outside the media industry have become practitioners and publishers of cultural criticism. As Kristensen and From (2015 in this special issue) point out, such "everyday amateur experts" (a concept the article returns to below) constitutes important cultural intermediaries in current media, and both Lavik (2008) and Verboord (2010; 2014) emphasize their status as a prominent phenomenon in the digital age. However, in light of current media developments and the centrality of cultural journalism in both the newsrooms and in audiences' consumption of journalistic content (cf. Kristensen 2010; Kristensen and From 2011), surprisingly little research has been conducted into online cultural criticism and the role of non-organizational actors in the production of it, and the practices and impact of this class of agents remains under-researched. So, while content generated by audiences and these audiences' practices have attracted much attention, the online cultural criticism specifically conducted by "ordinary people" remains a sparsely researched area (see, however, Lavik 2008; Vasquez 2014; Verboord 2010; 2014).

This article, presents a pilot study of the structural dimension of this type of cultural criticism. It maps Danish websites with reviews written by the agents Kristensen and From call everyday amateur experts, using that mapping as the empirical grounding that informs a theoretical discussion of the ramifications of this transition within the field of cultural criticism and for the cultural public sphere. This way, the article approaches the popular question of participating audiences from another vantage point than the politically oriented ones usually applied, and that allows for a different perspective on the subject. For even though cultural journalism and criticism does not hold a very prominent position on the journalism research agenda, it does constitute an important part of current journalistic practice as it results in content that takes up much column space in the media and is popular with the audiences (Knapskog and Larsen 2008; Kristensen 2010; Kristensen and From 2011). And in a historical and social context where old news organizations' privileged position in the production and public circulation of information and knowledge finds itself in a period of transition, the competition from non-organizational agents constitutes an important challenge to the traditional conditions for cultural criticism.

Cultural criticism, post-industrial journalism, and the cultural public sphere

The article integrates two perspectives from journalism research, namely those of cultural criticism (a part of the broader field of cultural journalism), on the one hand, and post-industrial journalism, on the other. While cultural criticism has constituted an integral part of journalistic practice for many years but is widely overlooked in the research community, post-industrial journalism (and related developments such as citizen journalism) represents a more recent but nonetheless prominent development in both journalism practice and research (see, e.g., Anderson, Bell, and Shirky 2012; Usher 2014). Furthermore, the foundation draws upon the sociology of the amateur and public sphere theory.

Cultural criticism

Since this article examines and discusses websites where "ordinary people" review arts and culture, cultural journalism and criticism constitute a central component of the theoretical framework. The review is one of the central genres of cultural journalism (Kristensen and From 2011; Lund 2005), but it is an atypical journalistic genre in the sense that while it caters to the news value of topicality, it is heavily opinion-based and only rarely makes claims of the objectivity doctrine that is prevalent in journalism. On the contrary, the review is a genre that is expected to express an opinion on it subject as it (also) provides a service to its audiences (cf. Eide 1992).

In addition to the inherently subjective orientation of reviewing, the difference between journalism and criticism is also apparent in the institutional setting of the two. While journalism exists primarily within the framework of the news media (but, increasingly, also in various context outside of established organizational ones), criticism is namely also embedded in academia where it constitutes a central discipline of the theoretical, analytical, and interpretational work of scholars (see Kristensen and From 2015 in this special issue). This link to the academy connects to the characteristics of criticism that it is usually grounded in specialist knowledge about the cultural field in question, and that the critic possesses special insight into that field.

The alternative character of the review in contrast to news reporting, of criticism in contrast to journalism, also translates into the profile of the critic. Journalists, as members of a certain profession, adhere to a number of ideals including objectivity (Deuze 2005), but subjectivity, constituting a most important dimension of the work reviewers do as they pass judgment on cultural

products, challenges this inclination. As McWhirther (2015 in this special issue) notes, reviewers often transgress the boundary between, on the one hand, detached observers and, on the other, "fanboys" or other types of heavy consumers with personal fascinations, preferences, and interests vested in the cultural products in question.

Kristensen and From (2015 in this special issue) propose the concept of the "heterogeneous cultural critic" in order to capture this plurality among the agents conducting cultural criticism. Here, they identify four types of cultural critics in the mediatized, digital era, each of which is characterized by its relation to established media organizations, modus of evaluation, and formal knowledge about the cultural field: the intellectual cultural critic, the professional cultural journalist, the media-made arbiter of taste, and the everyday amateur expert.

The fourth category in this typology is particularly relevant in connection with journalism's digital turn in general and constitutes a central reference point for this study specifically. Since it is ordinary people expressing their opinion and evaluations of cultural products given the means to do so through digital media, the everyday amateur expert is a cultural critic characterized by an absence of the institutional legitimacy and authority that comes from being affiliated with an established media organization. The criticism conducted by the everyday amateur expert is most often grounded in subjective evaluations based on personal preferences and the experience one gets from the cultural products under review. So, the everyday amateur expert is "offering subjective opinions and representing experience-based cultural tastes" (Kristensen and From 2015 in this special issue) grounded in the lifeworld rather than based on institutional recognitions of what is worthy of praise or scorn. This description resonates with Verboord's observation that "many amateur contributors [to cultural evaluation online] just draw on personal experience to share with their peers" (2014, 924).

That the everyday amateur experts' modus for reviewing is largely based upon experience does, however, not imply that it is disconnected from reason and knowledge. Kristensen and From develop their ideal type with reference to Stebbins' sociology of "modern amateurism" (1977), and one of his central points is that "The amateur, as a special member of the public, knows better than the run-of-the-mill member what constitutes a creditable performance or product" (Stebbins 1977, 587). Additionally, he emphasizes the seriousness of the amateur's preoccupation with the activity and the public character of the engagement in it, a characteristic that distinguishes the amateur from, for example, the hobbyist whose engagement with the activity is private in scope. One final characteristic of the amateur is the limited economic gains associated with the activity: while professionals make a living from what they do and are therefore in a position where they can do it full time, amateurs are, at best, able to generate a limited income from the preoccupation, which will, for this reason, typically first and foremost be a leisure activity.

Post-industrial journalism

The idea of the everyday amateur expert resonates with the current transformations in the media culture and of cultural production that technological developments such as digitalization have brought about. Here, the popular perception exists that everybody has the potential of being a journalist (or at least of conducting something that resembles journalism). With various centers of attention and epistemic nuances that perception is captured by the varied but also homonymous vocabularies of user-generated content (van Dijck 2009), the pro-am mediasphere (Bruns 2011), produsage (Bruns 2008), and participatory (Bowman and Willis 2003; Singer et al. 2011), grassroot (Gillmor 2004), citizen (Rosen 1999), and networked journalism (Russell 2011). These perspectives all relate to transformed patterns, if not hierarchies, of content production in the media and to an

implied challenge of the privileged position of the journalist. They also have a (most often implicit) normative legacy to the Habermasian ideal of individuals participating in the public sphere in common (Schultz 1999) – a legacy this article returns to below.

A most prominent diagnosis of this current development in journalism is the 2012 Tow Centre report *Post-Industrial Journalism* (Anderson, Bell, and Shirky 2012), which describes the loosening structural ties between journalism and that news industry it has existed within for more or less the entire 20th century. At its core, post-industrial journalism is "journalism [that is] no longer organized around the norms of proximity to the machinery of production" (Anderson, Bell, and Shirky 2012, 12; see also Searls 2001). That is, it is journalism dissociated from the established news industry where certain routines, fixed employment of journalists and other news workers, and a production-oriented infrastructure have made news-production an industrialized activity. "Before publishing became an industry", Searls (2001) asserts, ""information" wasn't a product. Nor was it commodified as "content" and forwarded like freight through the transport system we call "media."" In the process of industrialization of journalism and the media industry, these developments have occurred. In contrast, post-industrial journalism is journalism where content is not thought of as a commodity to begin with, and where news-making does not take place in an industrialized setting. Instead, the practitioners are "more motivated by the *need to know* and *the need to share* than by the need to tell a finished story" (Searls 2001, emphasis in original); that is, the driving force is not one of a commercial nature but rather an interest-based one grounded in active engagement with the subject area in question and, often, an urge to express oneself about it in writing. This way, it resonates with Stebbins' characterization of the amateur.

According to Anderson, Bell, and Shirky (2012), journalism currently finds itself in such a post-industrial state, where legacy news organizations no longer constitute the pivotal point of news production but has marginalized themselves. Instead, journalism is increasingly conducted by non-institutional actors who apply the approaches, formats, and ideology of journalism while working for media outlets such as the SCOTUSblog or Vox. Or it is conducted by "ordinary people" who utilize free, online tools to write and disseminate something that resembles news on blogs, online forums, social media, etc.

An underlying assumption in the conceptual framework of post-industrial journalism is the fundamental but sometimes forgotten condition that journalism and the media are two separate (though obviously closely connected) institutions. The media are, to begin with, vehicles for journalistic content to reach an audience, even if mediatization processes increasingly impact journalism and cause it to adapt to the media's ways of working (Kammer 2013).

It is important to remember that the notion of post-industrial journalism does not entail the radical development that news organizations no longer exist or play an important role in the production and circulation of news. On the contrary, as Usher (2014, 3) emphasizes, "Institutions still matter", and very much important and influential journalism is still conducted by actors within established news organizations (Starkman 2011). So, rather than speaking of post-industrialization as *the* development of the news industry, one should recognize that different developments occur at different places in the news media: while post-industrialization occurs outside of established media organizations, where a large diversity of alternative voices exist, contradictory processes of increased industrialization take place within large media organizations (cf. Andersson 2013).

Even though the Tow Centre report on post-industrial journalism is written from an American perspective and uses American examples predominantly, the phenomenon is not exclusively American: a recent study (Sørensen 2013) identifies 366 Danish websites where actors independent of established media organizations conduct some sort of journalism. In comparison, 31 Danish newspaper titles were published on a daily basis in 2013[1].

The way Anderson, Bell, and Shirky describe it, post-industrial journalism is a structural concept with reference to the institutional and organizational contingencies and practices of the production of news and other types of journalistic content. It is, however, also a concept that raises practical questions about what being industrial or being part of an industry means. Both Searls' writing and Anderson, Bell, and Shirky's conceptualize post-industrial journalism as journalism that is conducted *outside* the news industry. But that naturally raises the question of where the boundaries of the news industry are in the first place.

With a brief digression, take Filmz.dk as an example to illustrate the slipperiness of post-industrial journalism as an operationalizable concept. Filmz.dk is a Danish website dedicated to news, views, and reviews about cinema and television, and while there are administrators and an editorial board on the site, users can sign up and write news items, discuss articles, and participate in the forum. The site launched in 2002 as "an unofficial fan site, not an official medium for film news on any film"[2], and so, from the beginning, it qualified as a prototypical example of post-industrial journalism with its base outside an industry and content production undertaken by non-organizational agents.

However, since 2008, Filmz.dk has been embedded in a corporate setting as part of Newz Media Ltd., which is a media company with a CEO and a broad range of media related activities (e.g., general news site Newz.dk, newsletter management service FableCloud, and online video platform videovideo.dk). With regards to the content and to ordinary people's possibilities of contributing, this affiliation blurs the question of post-industrialism, because even though Newz Media Ltd. is certainly not a part of the "established" or "traditional" news industry (there is no "proximity to the machinery of production" of the old media), it is a highly commercial operation embedded in the industry of creative content production and distribution. It is not all journalistic, but it is part of an industry and works on a commercial basis.

So, Filmz.dk (and along with it a myriad of similar websites) finds itself in a position that challenges the distinction between industrial and post-industrial journalism. On the one hand, it may be indicative of the development where journalism no longer finds itself in a stable condition based in an industry, but it is, on the other hand, not in an entirely post-industrial state where the tenets of industrialization have rendered themselves obsolete.

Post-industrial cultural criticism, integrating the theoretical perspectives outlined above, is the reviewing of arts and culture conducted by agents on the outside of the news industry. To put that in context, cultural criticism and the idea of post-industrial journalism converge in the notion of an online cultural public sphere.

The cultural public sphere

As noted above, the normative foundation of the research into ordinary people's participation in public communication and journalism is often a democratic one that links to Habermas' (1989) theory of the public sphere. From this perspective, political legitimacy is negotiated through rational, public discourse, and the theoretical framework is, this way, a political, democratic one where citizens' participation is considered inherently good. On this basis, in the early 1990s, when the publication of the World Wide Web protocol popularized Internet access and enabled ordinary people to go online, academics and intellectuals alike expressed high hopes on behalf of the public sphere and its condition. With digital, networked media, broad participation in public discourse would be possible and could create a more inclusive public sphere where the discussion of matters between society and state would flourish (see Benson 2010 for overview).

Empirical studies, however, have only to a limited extent confirmed the hypothesis of the digital public sphere as a space with such increased democratic participation, even though recent development such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement constitute noteworthy cases. On the contrary, through analyses of the network of everyday online political communication, Hindman (2009), for example, shows how almost all online discussion revolves around the websites of established media organizations such as the CNN and The New York Times, even if a much broader circle of actors does, indeed, speak. But as Hindman puts it, "It may be easy to speak in cyberspace, but it remains difficult to be heard" (2009, 142), and, so, the actual democratization of public discourse is debatable.

Such diagnoses and their implicit disappointment may partly result from the perspective from which the online public sphere has been examined. The evaluation of the well-being of the online public sphere has, to a large extent, understood the political public sphere as *the* public sphere. At the center of attention has been the political realm and the relationship between society and state. This understanding is in line with Habermas' (1989) original conceptualization (even though he has moderated this point of view later; see Habermas 1994), but it also turns a blind eye to one important aspect of how he presents the institutions of the public sphere.

For what is often forgotten in connection with public sphere theory is that Habermas contemplated the public sphere as a two-layered structure for public discourse. In his original blueprint of the public sphere (1989), he explicitly distinguishes between the political public sphere ("the public sphere in the political realm") and the cultural one ("the public sphere in the world of letters"). The political public sphere is the one where questions of the organization of state and society and the relationship between the two are in focus, and this is the one Habermas ascribes primacy to, while he considers the cultural one merely "the training ground for a critical public reflection" (Habermas 1989, 29) where citizens can develop the discursive and rational skills necessary for participating in political debates.

The objects of discussion in this original conceptualization of the "public sphere in the world of letters" were cultural products. Social actors would gather in public places in order to form a public opinion on literature and theater, and so the objects of the initial public discourse were actually of a cultural rather than a political nature. This way, current online discussions on arts and culture would resonate with the cultural public sphere as described by Habermas, and so, the concept of that cultural public sphere can offer a fertile theoretical ground for analyzing online criticism of cultural products as it is conducted by "ordinary people" (i.e., cultural criticism within a post-industrial framework).

Methodology

Empirically, this study consists of a mapping of the entire field of post-industrial cultural criticism in the form of Danish websites where everyday amateur experts review arts and culture. Furthermore, the study quantitatively registers the features that allow audience engagement on these websites as well as the extent of this engagement in order to measure the potentialities for and actualizations of public discourse on the cultural field. Such mapping and registration provide an overview that allows for reflections upon the current structure of online cultural criticism in a post-industrial framework and, thereby, of the online cultural public sphere. It should be noted, however, that the study focuses on the structural properties at the macro level of the field while specific micro-level activities conducted by the individual agents should be the centre of attention in future studies.

No established methodological procedure exists for conducting a comprehensive mapping of all relevant websites within a certain field. However, one way of approaching it is to understand the task as a case of theory-based sampling of websites. A characteristic of such theory-based sampling is its iterative nature (Kuzel 1999) as it continues throughout the research process entire and enters a mutually informing relationship with the theoretical inquiry. While such sampling would collide with the means and ends of other types of empirical analysis (content analysis in particular due to its reliance upon pre-defined hypotheses, sampling frames, and coding schemes), it suits the purpose of this study well since the scope here is explorative and discussing in nature rather than hypothesis-driven.

With the mapping understood in terms of a sampling procedure, sampling criteria becomes crucially important, and the question is how one applies "post-industrial cultural criticism" as a sampling criterion. The approach applied here is to break down the concept into parts that can be operationalized on individual bases, allowing for the complex phenomenon to be manageable in terms of a few, measurable dimensions. In that process, two conceptual discussions arise concerning what to include and what not.

First, the ambiguity connected to the theoretical concept of post-industrial journalism and criticism poses tangible challenges for the mapping, where the line between post-industrial and industrial is often a most unclear one (cf. the Filmz example above). In connection with mappings such as this one, untouchable rules for sampling can only be formulated with great difficulty because many websites exist in grey zones between different categories (Falkenberg 2009; Sørensen 2013). That said, two questions guide whether any given website should be included in this mapping:

1) Is the website produced and published by an established media organization that is part of the traditional media industry? As the example with Filmz.dk above shows, some websites are obviously part of the (media) industry, but since they are not affiliated with the "old" media, they fall under the umbrella term of the post-industrial.

2) Are the reviews written by agents who, writing them, did not act in the capacity of being employed in the "old" media industry? Oprejst [Standing Up], for example, is a website dedicated to reviews of stand-up comedy and is run by Torben Sangild, who is a cultural critic affiliated with different Danish newspapers; on this website, however, he writes on behalf of himself alone and is, so, operating as a non-organizational agent there.

Websites, where the answer to the first question was 'no' and the answer to the second question was 'yes', are included in the mapping.

Second, any examination of cultural criticism naturally entails the question of what culture is in the first place. Williams (1983, 87) famously calls it "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language," invoking its meanings of both processes for intellectual, spiritual, or artistic development, ways of life, and intellectual or artistic practices or work. Likewise, in their examination of cultural journalism over the 20th century, Kristensen and From (2011; see also Kristensen 2010) arrive at a very inclusive understanding of the concept of culture that includes both cultural products and issues of life style and the lived life; from this perspective, both a film review and a how-to article about cooking the best meal for one's children's communions are types of cultural journalism.

The sampling procedure for this study, however, applies a more narrow or even conservative approach to the concept of culture than Kristensen and From, including only the websites that are centered around reviews of products of artistic expression such as films, literature, theater, music, etc.[3] This narrowing corresponds to Habermas' original conceptualization of the cultural public sphere as centered around the discussion of exactly products of arts and culture. So, applying this

narrower understanding of culture, the empirical dimension of the study supports a theoretical discussion of the state of the public sphere as it is in line with the original conceptualization.

In addition to these delimitations in operationalizing post-industrial cultural criticism, the study pays specific attention to the Danish case. Denmark is, along with the other Nordic countries, part of the media-systemic model of democratic corporatism (Hallin and Mancini 2004) which is characterized by, among other things, a socio-cultural history of public deliberation that resonates with the current development of online participation. This country also represents an interesting national context for this article because of the position cultural journalism occupies. The printed newspapers in particular have given increased priority to cultural journalism throughout the last century (Kristensen 2010; Kristensen and From 2011), and that trend makes the Danish case stand out: analyses of cultural journalism in the USA, for example, reveal how cutbacks and marginalization of the news coverage of arts and culture is a most widespread phenomenon on television (Szántó and Tyndall 2000) as well as in metropolitan newspapers (Szántó, Levy, and Tyndall 2004) there.

Applying these sampling criteria, the mapping of Danish websites where everyday amateur experts review arts and cultural is conducted through a combination (as recommended by Weare and Lin 2000) of queries on search engines, referrals from collector sites, links and blog-rolls on other websites, tips on social media and in conversations with practitioners within the field, and similar website overviews already compiled by other researchers or practicing journalists (Falkenberg 2011; Poulsen 2014; Sørensen 2013). Additionally, the mapping builds upon material from public sources such as US-based The Internet Archive and the Danish research infrastructure Netarkivet.dk [The Net Archive]. The empirical material is collected and micro-archived (Brügger 2005) with the SiteShoter software on December 5, 2014.

An important issue when sampling websites is that due to the lack of comprehensive inventories of the web, there is no way of making sure the approach captures all relevant websites. Some websites might perform poorly in search results, be inactive or inaccessible at the time of sampling, or go missing in the haystack of online content for all other sorts of reasons. However, in this study, the above-mentioned combination of different entry points functions as a means to reduce the risk of missing any websites and increase the likelihood of including all relevant websites in the mapping.

In addition to mapping websites, the study also examines the extent to which the mapped websites serve as spaces for discourse and audience engagement. This examination is conducted through a systematic registration of whether audiences on the websites can 1) write reviews themselves, 2) comment of existing reviews, and 3) participate in discussions in a public forum. This part of the study records whether the websites offer users the possibility of engaging discursively and also contains a count of the extent of audiences' engagement in discussion (measured in terms of the number of comments to the last 10 reviews before the data collection). This way, the analysis records the structural components of the cultural public sphere online and measures the actual level of engagement; it does not, however, engage in textual analysis by analyzing the qualitative properties of the discussion taking place as it is a pilot study that focuses on the structural properties of the online cultural public sphere understood as online cultural criticism conducted within a post-industrial framework.

The mapping of the online cultural public sphere

In total, the mapping finds 33 Danish websites that are built around post-industrial cultural criticism where everyday amateur experts review arts and culture (the full list of the website is

found in the Appendix). Even though these websites cover a broad variety of cultural fields, some types of culture are dominant; as Figure 1 shows, literature (16 websites) and films (9 websites) are the most popular cultural fields while exhibitions and stand-up comedy are the subject of only one website each.

[Figure 1 approximately here.]

To some extent, this distribution resembles findings in earlier studies of cultural journalism in traditional media. So, across national and historical contexts, literature consistently ranks as one of the most popular cultural fields in both cultural journalism in general (Janssen, Verboord, and Kuipers 2011; Kristensen 2010; Kristensen and From 2011; Larsen 2008) and as the object of cultural criticism (Kristensen 2009) in especially newspapers. Likewise, film constitutes a cultural field that is given high editorial priority (and has done so since before World War II, cf. Schepelern 1995; see also Kristensen forthcoming), even if Kristensen (2009) demonstrates how the number of film reviews is lower than that of reviews of both literature and popular music in Danish newspapers.

While it obviously reflects patterns in audiences consumption of culture (cf. Kristensen forthcoming), this recurrence in priority given to different cultural fields also indicates that an unspoken agreement exists between professional critics within news organizations and everyday amateur experts regarding which types of culture they consider legitimate and relevant objects of criticism. That agreement suggests that everyday amateur experts as a group have appropriated parts of the professional value system of cultural journalism grounded in media organizations, and that the practices of professional and amateur cultural critics are somewhat overlapping

In itself, the count of 33 websites does not generate much deeper understanding of the workings of everyday amateur experts in the digital age; compared to similar types of websites that relate to other fields, however, the number becomes interesting as it provides information about the relative prominence of different fields in the online space. Compared to, for example, websites with political journalism conducted by non-organizational actors, the quantitative difference is noteworthy: while 33 such websites review arts and culture, only 13 deal with politics (a figure appropriated from the research by Sørensen 2013). Cultural and political journalism are obviously different types of journalism, but the uneven distribution between the political and the cultural found here is interesting in that it proposes the usefulness of regarding the public sphere through a cultural rather than the traditional political prism and of turning analytical attention towards the original realm of public discourse (cf. Habermas 1989).

The question, however, remains what the conditions are for such discourse on arts and culture on the websites that constitute the online cultural public sphere. The registration of features of audience engagement on the websites serves to answer this question. Figure 2 shows the results of that registration; here, it is obvious that it is a much more widespread feature that audiences on the websites can comment on the reviews (which is possible on 27 of the 33 websites) than that they can initiate discourse themselves through posting their own reviews (3 of 33 websites) or discussing in a forum (6 of 33 websites). This way, also on websites where everyday amateur experts conduct cultural criticism, audiences are primarily allowed to react to already published content, which again resembles the practice found within news organizations (Hermida 2011).

[Figure 2 approximately here.]

Moving from the potentialities of public discourse to the actualization of it, the count of audience comments reveals that the mapped websites constitute a communicative structure where audiences do engage in the discussion of arts and culture through commenting the reviews. Of the 27 websites that hold the possibility of audiences posting comment to the reviews, the study counted the number of comments to the 10 most recent reviews in order to gauge the actual level of discourse; from a public sphere perspective, the potential of audiences making themselves heard is mainly a precondition for the discursive engagement found in actual participation in the discussion through making utterances in the public domain. It should be emphasized, however, that the sheer number of comments does not tell us anything about the content or quality of the discourse, and that further studies are required to address these dimensions of the public engagement.

The count shows that on the 27 websites that allow comments, 344 comments have been posted on the 266 examined reviews[4]. This way, each review had 1.29 comments on average. The comments are, however, not distributed evenly across the different websites and reviews: on the contrary, Gamereactor and Boghylden [The Bookshelf] had 175 and 82 comments, respectively, accounting for 75% of all the audience discussion, while eight websites had no comments at all. So, the figures show that the audiences do play an active role in the discussion of arts and culture in the online space that cultural criticism on the amateur websites constitutes, but even though public discussion does take place in connection with the post-industrial cultural criticism, it is a discussion largely limited to a few arenas.

This way, the websites where everyday amateur experts write reviews of arts and culture can be understood as a heterogeneous and inclusive public sphere where private individuals make themselves heard and do engage in public discourse. The engagement takes two forms: first, there is public engagement by the everyday amateur experts in the very writing and publication of the reviews and the public utterances that they constitute; second, there is public engagement by their audiences in their commenting on the reviews and in the discussion of arts and culture that follows from it. This discussion, however, does not exist across the entire online cultural public sphere but is largely reserved to a few websites. So, online spaces exist where ordinary people outside media organizations can discuss arts and culture, and where they do so to some extent. The question, however, is which expertise they bring into the discussion, and what claim can they have to interpretational and evaluative authority and legitimacy.

The everyday amateur expert

The everyday amateur expert is one ideal type within the framework of the heterogeneous cultural critic (Kristensen and From 2015 in this special issue), but it is also itself a broad term for a heterogeneous group of people. Across the variety of websites with reviews written by this type of cultural critics, different types of people are present, and even though most of the writers do not explicitly give any information regarding their background, it is clear that the amateurs live up to some of the characteristics of amateurs identified above.

Bogvægten [The Book Scale] illustrates the expertise represented in the corps of everyday amateur experts. It is a website that is dedicated to reviews of literature, and these reviews are written by a body of 20 persons that includes university students (predominantly Literature Studies and Film and Media Studies), people with a BA or MA in Literature Studies, pedagogues, librarians, and one person with a PhD from an aesthetic subject area.[5] This way, the critics on this

website can be expected to be highly capable within their field, even though they are not trained, "professional" journalists or critics; this observation resonates with Stebbins' (1977) characterization of the amateur as someone with more knowledge than the ordinary person. The same phenomenon is apparent on, for example, Filmz.dk, where most of the reviewers present themselves as some type of "film buffs" with specialized knowledge about the history, aesthetics, and institutional framework of films, and on MortenHede.dk, where the one person reviewing has taught drama and acting classes prior to his current side-business of conducting online reviews of theater.

That many of the people conducting this type of post-industrial cultural criticism possess specialized knowledge about the subject areas they write about contradict a widespread understanding, namely that the democratization of the means of journalistic production undermines the quality of the output. It is a critique often voiced, particularly by actors within the news industry. Hermida (2011), for example, notes how journalists and editors in principle support the idea of allowing "ordinary people" to participate in the journalistic process but would, simultaneously, actually prefer to keep them out of the journalistic work because it jeopardizes the perceived high standard of the journalistic product. Likewise, more polemic pieces have mourned the qualitative shortcomings and the deterioration of the public sphere following the "cult of the amateur" associated with the proliferation of the so-called Web 2.0 (see, e.g., Keen 2007).

The fact that non-organizational agents who review on websites are, on the one hand, amateurs in the sense that they do not get paid and, on the other hand, highly specialized experts in their field challenges the notions of what constitutes professionalism and amateurism within cultural journalism and criticism. Reviewers with a university degree from an aesthetic discipline might have more insight about the subject matter than especially the younger reviews who are employed by media organizations but are not necessarily educated in the field they write about (cf. Hovden and Knapskog 2008). So, one could ask whether a process of de-professionalization really occurs when "the people formerly known as the audience" conduct cultural criticism – or whether the process of such specialists conducting reviews could, rather, result in an improved knowledge base within the field of cultural criticism, even though the writers might not be trained intermediaries. So, the situation where everyday amateur experts conduct reviews of arts and culture suggests that the so-called de-professionalization could also be considered a professionalization process where the collective knowledge about the subject areas is increased.

This finding empirically supports Kristensen and From's (2015 in this special issue) claim that the everyday amateur expert challenges the hierarchically privileged position of cultural critics in the established media organizations. And it challenges the actors within the traditional media organizations as the amateurs assume the task of conveying insightful cultural journalism and criticism to the audiences – a task that had, hitherto, been reserved for media organizations and highly specialized journals.

Conclusions and directions for further research

This study proposes two arguments concerning the conditions for online cultural criticism conducted by everyday amateur experts.

First, the mapping suggests that structurally, post-industrial cultural criticism online constitutes an extensive and diverse field for public discussion and negotiation of cultural value and hierarchies. The sheer number of websites with reviews authored by everyday amateur experts indicates that a thriving online cultural public sphere exists, and the widespread possibility of and

interest in engaging in the discussion support that claim, even if the majority of the discussion takes place on a limited number of websites.

Second, the study (somewhat contradictory) suggests that it is a heterogeneous body of agents who conducts post-industrial cultural criticism (indicating a most inclusive cultural public sphere), but that many of these agents have an educational or professional background in the subject area they review (indicating the reproduction of old patterns of elitism also in the cultural public sphere). So, the everyday amateur expert – itself one category among many within the framework of the heterogeneous cultural critic (Kristensen and From 2015 in this special issue) – represents a complex constellation of knowledge, authority, and cultural intermediation that is not unambiguous. But the findings constitute an occasion for reconsidering the widespread perception that non-professional agents doing journalism and/or criticism deteriorate the quality of the content. These optimistic notes are, however, challenged by the fact that many of the everyday amateur experts who stated their backgrounds on the websites have a formal education or even research experience in aesthetic disciplines. So the amateurs simultaneously reproduce patterns of elitism in the cultural debate and represent a body of alternative voices.

For this reason, the study also calls for further research into the field of cultural criticism conducted by amateur agents online. First, the examination of the backgrounds of the everyday amateur experts shows that on many websites, the amateurs do not state what their backgrounds are. That clouds the systematic insight into the everyday amateur expert's claim to expertise, and a more rigorous survey of who the critics are and what their formal educational and work-related backgrounds are would advance the knowledge of this area. Second, the public sphere perspective applied above prompts the question of *how* people actually engage in public discussions about arts and culture. It is one thing that the websites offer the possibility of engaging in the discussion through commenting on content or posting in a discussion forum, and that the number of comments suggests that audiences actually accept the invitations – but the question remains how the actual discussion plays out, what characterizes the comments and arguments put forth on a textual, rhetorical, and discursive level. Much research already exists with a focus on online discussion in the political realm, but the constitution of online cultural debate remains sparse.

And third, the pattern found in the numbers of cultural and political websites authored by non-organizational actors is likely different in other national contexts than the one examined here. In a US context, for example, an examination of the Columbia Journalism Review's "Online News Startups" database[6] reveals the opposite pattern than seen in Denmark. Here, 18 websites are filed under arts and culture, 38 under politics. These differences in findings dependent on geographical context suggest that future studies into post-industrial cultural journalism and criticism could apply a comparative perspective in order to further map and understand differences between different societal and journalistic cultures.

NOTES

1. Source: The Danish Audit Bureau of Circulation (http://www.do.dk/).
2. https://web.archive.org/web/20020625115031/http://www.filmz.dk/info.php; captured by the Internet Archive on June 25, 2002; accessed December 5, 2014; translated by me. See also Andersen (2004).
3. Some of the sampled websites, however, also contain other types of cultural journalism such as reports from, for example, film festivals, award shows, gallery openings, etc.

4. One website was so new that it had only published six reviews, causing the 10-reviews-per-website approach for counting comments to only amount to 266 instead of the expected 270 reviews.
5. See http://www.bogvaegten.dk/1-91-bogvaegtens-anmeldere.html; accessed December 5, 2014.
6. http://www.cjr.org/news_startups_guide/, accessed December 5, 2014.

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Appendix

Danish websites centered on amateur reviews of arts and culture and their participatory potentials and actualization (as of December 5, 2014).

Website	Cultural field(s)	One or more reviewers?	Can users write reviews?	Can users post comments to reviews?	Number of comments (to the last 10 reviews)	Can users discuss in a forum?
Bogblogger	Literature	More	No	Yes	0	No
Bogbrokken	Literature	One	No	Yes	0	No
Boghylden	Literature	One	No	Yes	82	No
Bogrummet	Literature	More	Yes	No	-	No
Bogstavsamleren	Literature	One	No	Yes	4	No
Bogvægten	Literature	More	No	No	-	Yes
Bøgernes Labyrint	Literature	One	No	Yes	3	No
Cinema Online	Films	More	No	Yes	1	Yes
CinemaZone	Films	More	No	Yes	6	Yes
Den Lille Bogblog	Literature	One	No	Yes	6	No
Fiktion & Kultur	Films / TV / literature / comics / media / arts	More	No	Yes	0	No
Film-nyt	Films	More	No	Yes	1	No
Filmz	Films	More	No	No	-	Yes
Gamereactor	Games	More	Yes	Yes	175	Yes
GregersDH	Theater	One	No	Yes	1	No
HipHipAnmeldelser	Music	One	No	Yes	17	No
Isla Negra	Literature	One	No	Yes	0	No
K's bognoter	Literature	One	No	Yes	0	No
Kronoper	Films/TV	One	No	Yes	5	No
Kultur for Unge	Literature	More	No	Yes	4	No
Kulturcaféen	Literature	One	No	Yes	4	No

|						
Kulturformidleren	Film/theater	One	No	Yes	0	No
Kulturkongen	Films/music/stage art/literature/exhibitions	More	Yes	No	-	No
Kulturpennen	Films/literature/music	One	No	Yes	2	No
Kunsten.nu	Arts	More	No	Yes	5	Yes
Magasinet KBH	Film/theater	More	No	Yes	0	No
Mest om bøger	Literature	One	No	Yes	2	No
Morten Hede	Stage art	One	No	Yes	3	No
Nummer9.dk	Comics	More	No	Yes	17	No
Oprejst	Stand-up comedy	More	No	Yes	6	No
Popcorn.dk	Films	One	No	No	-	No
Teateranmeldelse.dk	Theater	More	No	No	-	No
Undertoner.dk	Music	More	No	Yes	0	No

Figures
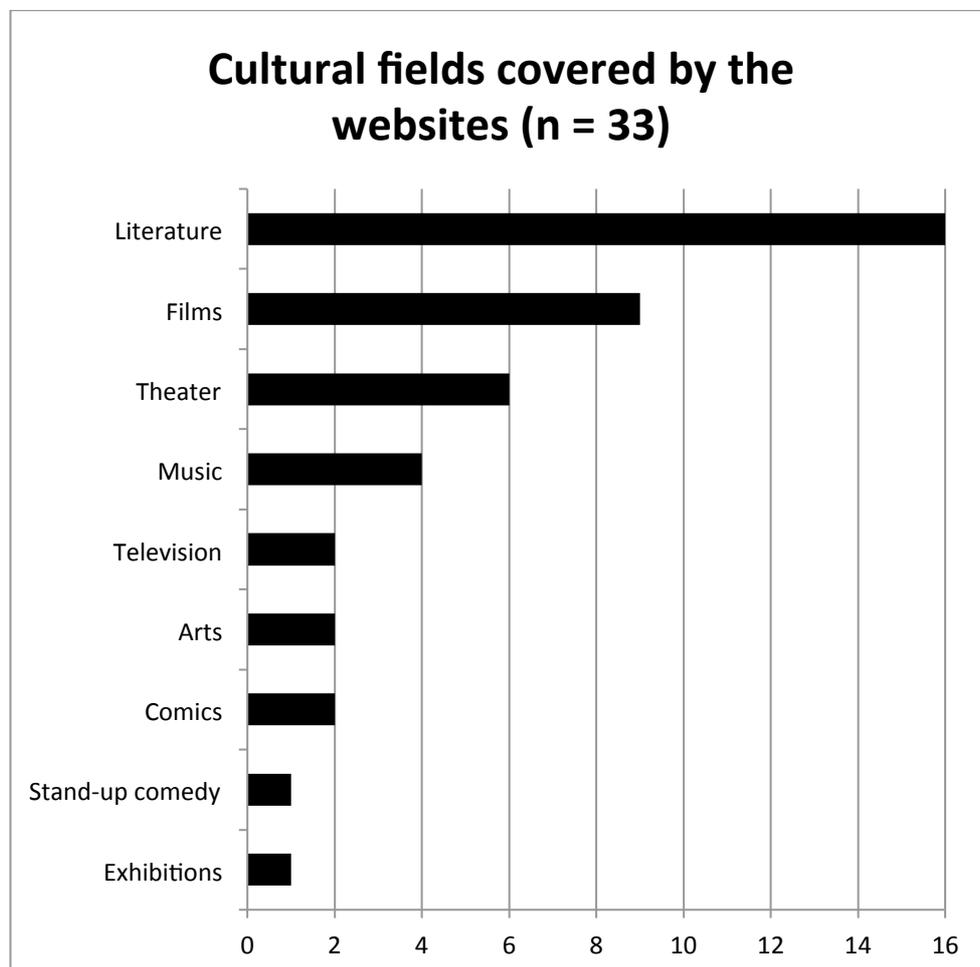
Figure 1: Cultural fields covered by the websites in the mapping (n=33). Some websites cover more than one cultural field, causing the accumulated number of covered cultural fields to exceed 33.
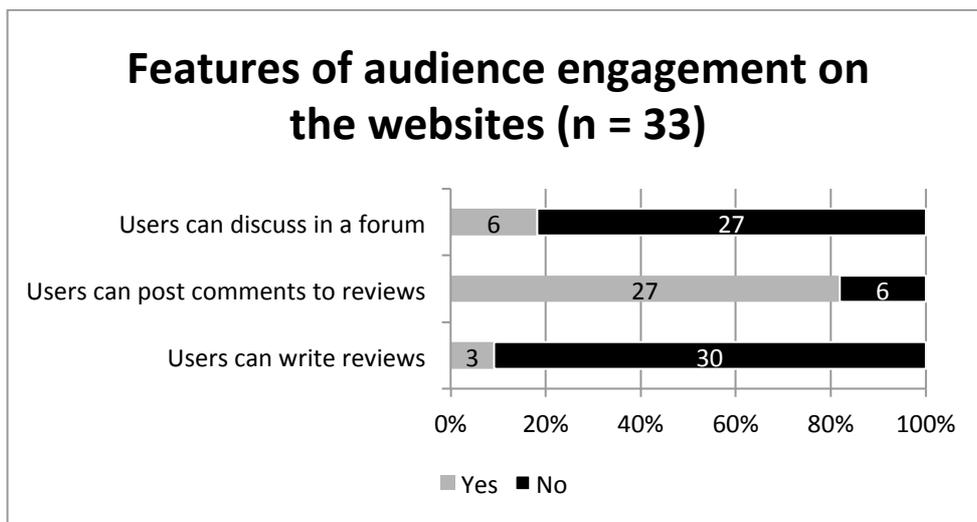
Figure 2: Features of audience engagement on the websites (n = 33).