

American Film Criticism in the 21st Century: Everyone is a Critic (?)

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Abstract

Film criticism in the United States went through significant changes over the last 50 years due to the technological involvements and, thus, the altering needs of the moviegoers. In the 20th century, the evaluations of the film critics mattered more to the consumer who sought recommendation for movies. Through the examination of the paradigm shifts that occurred from the second half of the 20th century until today such as the widespread popularity of the television, the home video, and the Web 2.0 one can observe a transformation in the American film critic industry, that also led to the rise of amateur film reviews. This paper focuses on American film criticism from the 1960s and discusses in what ways the television, the home video, the film rating websites (*IMDB*, *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Metacritic*) and the social media network Twitter have altered both professional and amateur film criticism.

Keywords: *film criticism; paradigm shifts; television; Twitter; Pauline Kael; Richard Schickel.*

1. Introduction

American film criticism in the 20th century contributed highly to the shaping of the film culture of the United States of America. A film critic did not only point out the positive and the negative aspects of a movie but also called the attention to the works of certain directors, screenwriters, or actors. Critical opinion mattered more to the consumer who sought recommendation for movies. In this regard, film critics, such as Pauline Kael, Richard Schickel, Roger Ebert, or Andrew Sarris

were regarded as reliable sources on the worthiness of films. With the beginning of the 21st century, however the American film critic industry began to change. The introduction of the Web 2.0 in the early 2000s and the beginning shift from the printed media to the online journalism have opened the way towards an online realm where the freedom of expressing one's opinion is now provided for the mass through the arsenal of film critic blogs and social media services. We have reached an era when the flow of data has sped up and critical thinking on film is being pushed in the background against the flood of comments and reactions of amateur, self-made critics on the various online platforms. The first spark that ignited the change in the work of American film critics occurred decades before the Web 2.0. More precisely, there were two major paradigm shifts concerning both the distribution and the reception of American films which resulted in the slow downfall of professional film reviews and the change of the American film culture, namely, the introduction of the television in the 1940s and the growing interest in the home videos from the 1980s. In fact, in the 1990s, American film critics such as Richard Schickel, Roger Ebert, Susan Sontag and Stanley Kauffmann were talking about the loss of film culture and, thus, the rapid decline of moviegoers who were interested in the work of film critics (Haberski Jr 2001: 1).

This paper looks at American film criticism from the 1960s and discusses how the television and the Internet have made a great impact on the alteration of professional film criticism in the United States of America. By introducing how the television, and then, from the 21st century on, the most popular film rating websites (*IMDB*, *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Metacritic*) and the social media site Twitter affected the American households, I argue that film criticism as a profession has come to its end through the "hands" of the media and the online platforms or, perhaps, critical thinking has been altered to cope up with the needs of the Internet generation, still giving opportunities to film critics to rise.

By analyzing the changes that occurred in American film criticism from the second half of the 20th century until today my aim is

to provide an answer why professional film critics have less influence on the moviegoers today and to search for possible alternatives that could keep film criticism an active and inclusive profession in the United States of America.

2. American film criticism in the 1960s and 1970s

2.1. The Golden Age of film criticism

Professional film criticism was a blooming profession in America, especially between the 1940s and 1970s. Names, such as Otis Ferguson, James Agee, Manny Farber, Stanley Kauffman, Andrew Sarris, Richard Schickel, Roger Ebert, or Pauline Kael were well-known and recognized among the moviegoers and in the film industry of the United States of America. The mid and late 20th century held new opportunities for film critics to widen their audience. National newspapers (such as *The Washington Post*, *New Yorker* or the *Los Angeles Times*) created separate columns for film reviews and hired their own film critics to write their opinions on the newest movies of the given time. This overt popularity can be connected to the lack of any other sources to be informed on a film (except for listening to the radio or going to the movies). The limited possibilities made it easier for the film criticism as a profession to gain popularity among the Americans. Besides formulating evaluations of cinematic productions, several film critics contributed to the filmic scene with their other insightful literary pieces such as Andrew Sarris's work, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (1968) where he "canonized American directors and ranked a number of movies." (Cristian 2014)

Also, around the 1960s and 1970s, movie culture took a new form given that people could watch foreign films in the universities, in movie theaters or in coffee houses which created new opportunities for movie lovers to discuss their opinions and enjoy the cinema together, which led to the birth of the so called cinephiles, people who felt inspired and affected by movies (Haberski Jr. 2001: 1). Richard Schickel, film reviewer for *Time* magazine, noted that the cinephile was someone who was interested in foreign films more than national ones; also, the group of

cinephiles was “a democratically self-elected elite that was in some way reshaping the culture.” (Schickel in Haberski Jr. 2001: 2)

Despite Schickel’s opinion of the film generation of America in the 1960s, Professor Raymond J. Haberski Jr. in his book, *It’s Only a Movie!: Films and Critics in American Culture* (2001) called this period the first time when film critics were respected as individuals, given that movie lovers were not only interested in cinema but were also keen to know what critics said about the movies (Haberski Jr. 2001: 2). One of the turning points in the reception of films happened in 1967, with the premier of the movie *Bonnie and Clyde* (dir. Arthur Penn, 1967) at the Montreal Film Festival due to the film’s unusual story, since it “turned bad guys into heroes and made violence seem humorous” (Haberski Jr 2001: 174). *Bonnie and Clyde* became part of the popular culture which caused controversy among film critics. Bosley Crowther, reviewer for *The New York Times*, hated *Bonnie and Clyde* and could not understand how the audience who saw it at the film festival could enjoy what they witnessed on the screen (Haberski Jr. 2001: 176). Crowther dismissed the overt violence he witnessed in *Bonnie and Clyde* and was against the celebration of the film.

Pauline Kael, film critic for *The New Yorker* from 1968 to 1991 also despised the newly formulating culture which *Bonnie and Clyde* premiered in and had a negative opinion of the film generation in the 1960s. Kael stated that films which were part of the popular culture ended the deep, even artistic relationship between the movies and moviegoers and movies would turn into an everyday entertainment without any deeper meaning (Kael 1969). It was partly because Kael was a film critic who always used the pronoun “we” when she was writing a film review, thinking that those who go and watch the movie she wrote about would share her opinion. Kael had the idea that one’s perception of a film he or she watches in the cinema could “influence the atmosphere in which movies were made.” (Haberski Jr 2001: 187) In her essay written in 1969, titled “Trash, Art and the Movies” Kael expresses her deep concerns towards the television culture, saying that the film industry is turning into something else, as most of the directors

“are beginning their careers by working on commercials,” which is like a “one-sentence resume of the future of American motion pictures.” (Kael 1969). However, Kael’s main concern, was the slow disappearance of the so called ‘art film’, claiming that movies of the era lacked the quality to be called art.

2.2. The television era

The change that was happening within the American film culture in the 1960s had another determinative point. More American households had televisions which meant new opportunities for both the film industry and the film critics to reach a wider audience. The introduction of the television occurred in the 1940s, and the television set gained popularity during the 1950s as it was not a luxury item anymore but a necessity in an American family (Burns 2010: 33). The most popular shows were sitcoms; films being broadcasted in television appeared in the second half of the 1950s. However, the television culture of America was changing rapidly from the 1960s on. Besides the growing variety of television films, the number of talk shows and advertisements aired on tv also flourished. Until the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, television was the dominant source for information.

Television was a promising platform for film critics to try. In 1964, Judith Crist, film critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, started reviewing films on *The Today Show*, which was a weekly television talk show in America. Crist soon became a demanded figure in the world of film criticism on television, so that in 1966 that she started reviewing films for *TV Guide* and, in 1974 she wrote her review book, the *TV Guide to the Movies* (1974) (Roberts 2010: 253). The television tempted other American film reviewers as well, such as Stanley Kauffmann, who had a talk show *The Art of Film* (1963-1967), where he invited film directors, producers, screenwriters, and actors to discuss “the techniques, processes and artistry of filmmaking.” (Roberts 2010: 256)

One of the most popular American film critics of the 1970s, Roger Ebert, also saw a great opportunity in the wider introduction of the television. Ebert was a film reviewer at the *Chicago Sun-Times* from

1965 and the first American film critic to win the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1975. In the same year, Ebert and his colleague Gene Siskel started a weekly film rating show called the *Opening Soon in a Theater Near You*. The show's name was changed to *Sneak Previews* in 1978, when it was distributed nationally by PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). Therefore, Ebert and Siskel became the first persons who not only reviewed films on television every week but also gave them ratings, based on how good or bad they were. Before Ebert and Siskel, more than 30 years earlier, in the 1930s, film critic Loretta King, was the first person who applied a similar, four-star rating system for films (Roberts 2010: 82). Ebert and Siskel used the 'thumbs up or thumbs down' method for rating films: two thumbs up meant good, and two thumbs down meant bad. Ebert's and Siskel's show became so popular it aired for 30 years with changes in the title and in the production

The fame of the *Sneak Previews* generated a wide range of interest in television shows where people could enjoy watching as film critics discuss film in a lively way. In fact, *Sneak Previews* ignited a change in the attitude of the audience towards film criticism for the profession started to become a means of entertainment. With their thumbs-up and thumbs-down method of rating Ebert and Siskel reduced the importance of intellectual discourse to a level where the critical standards were eroded (Roberts 2010: 271). What is more, by displaying film trailers weekly on their show, Ebert and Siskel provided free advertisement for the films of both the big and small studios. Also, an excerpt from a movie could make the viewer immune to the discussion they heard from the two critics since their attention could be carried away by the "subject matter or the star [they saw] in the clip." (Roberts 2010: 272) Rather than reading an insightful analysis of a film written in a newspaper, most American households chose to turn on their televisions and watch a shorter review, filled with catchphrases and staged arguments. Furthermore, seeing the interest in film rating shows, national newspapers and magazines changed their film reviewing strategy and started to apply the same rating method instead of lengthy reviews. The sudden change in the attitude of the media which

conveyed the message of film critics also indicated that film reviewers should alter their style and, instead of writing an honest review on a film which was often filled with negative observations and insightful analyzations, film critics were expected to use a more positive tone and to leave out the negative parts of their reviews to make the reader feel content and entertained.

Richard Schickel, just like Pauline Kael, expressed his concerns towards television culture in his 1967 article, "Public Television: A Cultural Overkill." Schickel claimed that television would never be a means of education and one could never be able to experience the pleasure of art from their living rooms through a tiny screen (Schickel 1967: 10). By letting people choose what to watch, there is a minor chance that they would choose a high-level program, which means that television "is less a means of communication than it is a form of communion." (Schickel 1967: 10)

The sharp distinction film critics such as Kael and Schickel made between low and high entertainment suggested that only those who chose to watch the so-called art films could be the real participants of the intellectual elite of the American cinema. However, "as fewer significant differences separated mass culture, popular culture, and art from each other" (Haberski Jr. 2001: 185) from the second half of the 1960s, the newly emerging film generation rejected "the elitism of previous cultural authorities" (Haberski Jr. 2001: 186) and did not wish to distinguish movies based on their artistic values anymore.

The newfound demand of the television was not beneficial for the film critics since the film studios started to create trailers for the movies picking only one or two catchy words out from the lengthy film reviews and inserting them into the marketing campaigns of their movies. Therefore, film criticism started to be pushed into the background while the selected, often laudatory, and positive phrases and slogans used by the film studios to advertise their cinematic productions enjoyed great attention among the moviegoers. Television, in this context, affected film criticism both positively and negatively. On the one hand, TV widened the range of platforms with which film critics

could reach their audience. On the other hand, TV shows prevented substantive content and demanded more simplified words and expressions.

3. The conquest of the home video and HBO

Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, Hollywood based the success of a new film primarily on the opening weekend sales, meaning that the box office numbers after the opening of the films could provide feedback for the filmmakers and told them whether the film was a success, or if it was a failure. Therefore, film critics had a shorter time frame provided to formulate their opinions as they had to write and publish their reviews on the opening weekend of a movie if they wanted their audience to read their words. Publishing a review days after the opening weekend could hardly have any effect on the readers. What is more, the viral spread of the VHS tapes in the American households made it possible for consumers to watch a film as many times as they wished for without having to buy the tape multiple times.

Also, watching a film on a tape at home put the control in the hands of the viewer, as they could pause, fast forward and rewind a film, which also provided them with the possibility of understanding a scene better and discussing a film at home, exchanging ideas on the filmic experience. As the demand for VHS tapes rose, more and more video rental stores appeared in the United States of America, which provided a high range of films for the audience to borrow in exchange for money. Takeaway films became widely available for the Americans. In fact, film studios started to make higher numbers of movies for television or for VHS tape release only, causing film critics a hard time as it was difficult to win back the people who chose their living rooms instead of the big screen. Despite their endeavors, film critics seemed to lose the battle against the marketing campaigns, commercials and the wide availability of home videos that seemed to win the American citizens' hearts. The era of the VHS tapes came to its end in the early 2000s with the introduction of the DVD. Besides giving the power to the viewer to control the cinematic experience, just like in the case of the

VHS tape, most DVDs offer “‘add-ons’ with background information, interviews, and commentaries,” (Mulvey 2006: 27) which completely differs from what moviegoers experienced in the movie theaters. By enabling commentaries in the background of a movie, or switching back and forth between scenes, the narrative experience changes, as the audience can interact with the flow and space of the film. Due to the power of controlling the picture and the sound of the film one watches, the viewer can store more information about certain scenes and characters they wish to remember later.

In 2014, Richard Brody’s article, “The Film Critic in the Internet Era” in *The New Yorker* emphasized the fact, that having a television at home makes it significantly easier to access movies. However, the cinematic experience differs, since watching a film at home, without the exaggeration of certain sounds, and scenes, cannot give the same feeling as going to the movies (Brody 2014). Therefore, the content of the review a film critic writes depends on where he or she watched the film. Brody’s claim can mean that the opinions of those who decide to write a review on the film rating websites or on the film critic blogs can differ reasonably, not just because the taste of the general public can hardly be the same but also due to the fact that they did not watch the film on the same platform.

Many movies released on VHS tapes did not require an in-depth analysis of film critics to persuade the viewer to watch them since they were already well-known by their box office numbers- such as the first *Star Wars* film (George Lucas 1977) that got released on VHS in May 1982 (Star Wars Home Video). Long-form reviews got competitors in the form of film trailers and marketing campaigns. Therefore, I shall call the introduction of the home videos the second paradigm shift that shaped American film criticism.

However, the launch of a premium television channel in November 1972 redefined television and directed the filmic experience into the living rooms of the Americans before the introduction of the VHS tapes. The HBO (Home Box Office) has by now grown into one of the most successful subscription-based cable channels by now not only

in the United States of America but also in Europe. In 1981, the channel decided to move from a few hours of programming towards a 24-hour service, which meant a bigger competition for the movie theatres. In 1985, when the home video debuted, HBO (just like other television channels such as SHOWTIME) could not “live by movies alone,” (Mesce Jr 2015: 106): it needed another tactic to keep its subscribers. This tactic was called the original programming, which was part of the company since their debut, but it was treated “as an adjunct, an extra.” (Mesce Jr 2015: 107) As Bill Mesce Jr. points out, original programming was a great opportunity “to brand a network as something unique and distinctive and give it the boast that it had something new and novel to offer.” (Mesce Jr 2015: 113) From the 1990s on HBO realized that the future of cable programming was in television series. Over the last 25 years, HBO made iconic television series, such as the Emmy-winning (in 2001: Outstanding Comedy Series) *Sex and the City* (Darren Star 1998–2004). The overt popularity of television series seemed to partly undermine American film criticism, as reviewing a 1-or-2-hour long movies tends to be an easier job than the constant evaluation of a series with often more than 20 episodes and several seasons. HBO has reconfigured film consuming customs and has paved the way for more broadcasting television channels to rise such as AMC, which created series like *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan 2008-2013) or *The Walking Dead* (Frank Darabont, Angela Kang 2010-2022).

Over the last 20 years HBO has recognized the changing needs of the film consumers and, in 2010 created its online streaming platform, HBO Go. In May 2020, HBO launched its subscription video on demand service HBO MAX, which is now one of the most commonly used film streaming platforms in the United States of America besides Netflix (1997) (Buchi 2020).

The popularity of the home video has established the feeling of comfort and practicability that was tailored to the needs of the film consumers which from the 2010s on led to the birth of the online streaming sites. Within a relatively short period of time, the movie going habits of the Americans have altered reasonably. The movie making

companies gave the opportunity for their viewers to take control over how many times they wish to watch a film, an episode of a series or even a movie scene by first releasing their films in the form of VHS tapes and DVDs, then, with the creation of various online streaming platforms (HBO MAX, Netflix, Hulu). The consumption experience is a crucial tool for film, television, and online streaming companies since by being aware of the needs of the moviegoers they are able to form their services according to the current trends and demands. In this context, what can the film critics add to the filmic experience? Film reviews are being replaced by short descriptions on the back of a DVD or by the information pages of movies on the streaming sites.

4. The third impostor: the Web 2.0

4.1. The film blogs and the movie rating websites

From the 2000s, with the third paradigm shift, the age of the Web 2.0 has begun, and the already struggling film critics had to face several more obstacles. The term, Web 2.0, was coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004 "to describe a second generation of the web (Tokar 2009: 21). In 2006, O'Reilly described the Web 2.0 on his own website, *Radar*, as a "business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as a platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform." (O'Reilly 2006) The main rule of the Web 2.0 was to "build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them." (O'Reilly 2006) More precisely, Web 2.0 is an improved version of the previously known worldwide web that offers more space for the user-generated contents, enabling users "to create, share, collaborate and communicate their work with others, without any need of any web design or publishing skills." (Lipika 2016)

The ability to cope with the technological developments was not an easy challenge for the older generation of critics, many of them decided to quit. In the meantime, however, more film critique blogs appeared on the Internet. One of the most well-known film critics of America's history, Roger Ebert, also recognized the potential of the Internet and moved his reviews to the online space creating a film

review website, the 'rogerebert.com.' The webpage receives timely acclamation and is one of the most acknowledged film reviewing blogs for eight years even after Ebert's death. By looking at the example of Ebert, one could claim that the film review blogs do not necessarily mean the end of professional film criticism: on the contrary, they could even help make the profession recognized again. Those cinephile bloggers who cared about the deeper analyzation of the movies got a greater chance to find their audiences with the help of the Internet and, as author Christian Keathley (Keathley 2011: 178) points out:

the emergence of a number of sophisticated cinephile bloggers has coincided with a revival in academic circles of the kind of 'expressive' criticism devoted to close reading and evaluation.

However, the majority of film review blogs nowadays are run by non-professional film critics, people who like to share their opinions on a film simply for entertainment purposes and without getting paid in exchange for their reviews. In fact, the popularity of the film reviewing sites has grown reasonably over the last ten years which led to the fact that up until 2021, there are more than 100 film critique blogs from the United States of America available on the Internet (Film Spot, 2021).

Perhaps the first crucial turning point in film criticism in the era of the internet was the introduction of the so-called film rating websites that not only provide a quick review of movies in a form of a 1-10 rating system or a 0-100 scale of percentage but also let the readers write their own opinions on the films in the comment sections. The Internet has a range of film rating websites, such as the *Internet Movie Database (IMDB)*, *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Metacritic*, *E!*, *Yahoo!*, *Movies.com* or *Fandango*. Since the market for the Internet based film reviews grew, the demand for printed movie magazines escalated. Many print journals, such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, or *The Washington Post*, however, revitalized their working method and, just like Roger Ebert, created their own, mostly subscription based, online spaces, where their readers could access the contents, they wished.

In 2001, Dave Kehr, film critic at *New York Times* until 2013, said in an interview (Erickson 2001) that “editors don’t want ‘experts’”, they want “standard Joes who won’t have some ‘pointy-headed’ reaction”. According to Kehr, the last thing editors want from the film critics is to “bring any kind of knowledge or experience to the subject matter” (id.). The battle between the old and the new media seemed to be decided for even film critics themselves saw the decline of their influence. Sharing knowledge on film through movie reviews became a burden for those who feel content with checking a quick critical consensus on a film rating site (Roberts 2010: 408).

Three of the most well-known film rating websites, *IMDB*, *Rotten Tomatoes* and *Metacritic* have reinforced the rating-based film reviewing which was popularized in 1975 by Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel. Still, neither *IMDB*, nor *Rotten Tomatoes*, nor *Metacritic* erased professional film criticism from their main concept: on the contrary, film reviews written by professionals are widely available; in fact, they are being collected carefully, making it easier for the reader to find them. The reason behind the popularity of these websites, besides the easily accessible reviews and ratings, is the opportunity they give for the non-professionals to express their opinions. The idea that a moviegoer can formulate his or her own viewpoint and can share it with the world is a tempting opportunity for many to take. In spite of the availability of professional film reviews on their platforms, by creating an aggregate score of the films, film rating websites tend to create an illusion of film criticism. For instance, when *Rotten Tomatoes* provides an average score of a film, most of the viewers of the site are satisfied with seeing the score and do not wish to read the reviews of the film critics. In his article written for *Indiewire*, Max O’Connel highlighted film director, Jake Paltrow’s words. Paltrow called the “splat vs. tomato” rating system of *Rotten Tomatoes* “dangerous” and “pretty scary” since this new technique of providing a quick review on a film might erase the previously known, sentence-based method of film criticism (O’Connel 2015). Still, Paltrow adds that he does not think film criticism as such

would disappear from the collective consciousness, on the contrary, it remains but it will continue to change. (O'Connell 2015)

Nevertheless, when one searches for online services that provide in-depth analysis of cinematic productions, instead of movies, television shows and series get greater attention from professional and semi-professional reviewers. Websites such as *Spoilertv* (2007) and *Tvfanatic* (2011) are devoted to offering daily updates and discussions on several popular shows and series, aired both by broadcast and cable television. Instead of the number-based rating system, *Spoilertv* and *Tvfanatic* stick to the word-based, long-form reviewing style.

5. Social media: the real game changer

Due to the expanding possibilities of feedback on a movie being provided for the moviegoer, articles about the disappearing of quality film reviews appeared. In 2006, journalists such as, David Carr (*New York Times*) and Patrick Goldstein (*Los Angeles Times*) wrote about the phenomenon, claiming that the downfall of professional film criticism has begun. Still, in 2006, neither the journalists and film critics nor the moviegoers were aware of the introduction of another milestone in the history of film reviewing: the popularity of the social media platforms, such as Facebook (2004), Instagram (2009), or Twitter (2006). The collective name of these networks itself tells a lot about their concepts, since 'social' means some kind of interaction between people and the 'media' refers to the means through which these interactions take place. Recognizing the potential these platforms hold occurred after the 2010s. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram work based on the same method: they enable their registered users to share photos, videos and texts about any kind of content (exceptions are contents which violate the terms of the applications), to chat with each other privately, to make a comment under the posts they see and to express their opinion without writing it down through the so called 'like' or 'heart' buttons. What the social media age has brought into the realm of film criticism is the demand for instant reactions instead of well-considered, deep discussions on a topic.

Facebook, being the first social media platform in America where people can find their friends, acquaintances, can chat with them and share their own viewpoints on matters of the world, opened the door towards a new way of sharing one's assumptions and beliefs. When, 2 years later, in 2006, Twitter was launched, it offered a platform where one could write away their thoughts, even if they did not wish to share more than a word. Therefore, Twitter can be called a microblog that allows its registered users to send and receive short, up to 280 characters, posts which are called 'tweets'. What is more, one can follow other users of Twitter, can see, and react to their tweets and can also share the tweets one fancies on his or her own profile, which is called 'retweeting'.

With the help of social media platforms, anything can go viral within a minute. In consequence of this viral spread of the news, movie producing companies find it useful to create profiles of their movies on all the above-mentioned platforms in order to gain feedback more easily from the viewers. Twitter, out of the three networks, has remarkably developed the online film discussion. Through Twitter, a film producing company cannot only announce the release of an upcoming film of theirs, but they can also see the opinion of the fans through the number of likes and retweets the post has. Therefore, instead of waiting for a film review to be published after the release of a cinematic production, social media enables the film producing companies to inform themselves on the possible success or downfall of a film even before its release date in the cinemas. What is more, the users of Twitter can reply to a tweet which provides instant feedback for the studios. Fans, therefore, no longer have a passive, solely receptive role in the film culture, but rather, they can actively participate in the evaluation process, they can be seen and heard.

The popularity of Twitter can suggest that professional film critics ought to consider registration to the application to find a broader audience for themselves. In fact, film critic Roger Ebert was among the first critics who recognized the opportunity the Internet holds, as he did not only create his own film critique website, but he also had a Twitter

account where he posted regularly. Since Ebert's death in 2013, the account is being managed by others, mainly used for retweeting news concerning the American film industry. Since Ebert, the number of film journalists and film critics who own a Twitter account has been rising.

Both the film rating websites and the social media platforms give space for a new phenomenon concerning critical thinking: the unfolding of uncensored comments over well-formulated, thoughtful reviews of the skilled film critics. What is more, being able to react nearly any content one sees on the Web can create a new kind of online discussion, a virtual dialogue among people. These reactions often overshadow professional film reviews as they are short, often filled with emotions and the commenters tend to use vulgar words. Therefore, social media made it possible for any Internet user to be a self-made critic regardless of the style or the length of their reviews.

The Web 2.0 has brought a revolutionary change into the lives of the Internet users as it introduced user-generated contents and paved the way for the public to respond immediately to what they have seen or have read. In the case of the long-form journalism, however, Web 2.0 was not beneficial. Both the social media platforms and the film rating pages preferred the short, simplified version of the movie reviews over the lengthy journal articles. In this context, new media has been and is still affecting professional film criticism.

As much as the sharing of one's viewpoint on movies can endanger/jeopardize the job of professional film critics of America, it can also be viewed as a tool that has positive effects on the Internet society. A. O. Scott, chief film critic for *The New York Times* points out that critical thinking is a human feature that is present in each of us, and we can now take our chances to speak up, to not just listen or read the critics' words but to respond and to formulate our own critical opinions which makes us potential critics too. (Scott 2016, *The New York Times*)

What the Internet, or more precisely, the Web 2.0, has contributed to is the sharing of opinions. As a result, "on the Internet, everyone is a critic empowered by social media," and with that "the days of the all-powerful critic are over." (Scott 2016, *The New York Times*)

However, criticism has never been a rigid concept that could be limited to the reviews of professional film evaluators. On the contrary, criticism starts as soon as we come out of the movies and discuss with our friends what we have just seen. The difference between the pre-Web 2.0 era and the current Internet-dominated world is that now we can share our critical evaluations and thoughts with mainstream audiences right after coming out of the cinema through the online platforms.

Naming everyone a potential critic can indicate their influence on the readers. Why is the film consumer society interested in the often-biased words of a self-made critic more than it would pay attention to the texts of the film critics? Does a subjective opinion of a cinephile influence the moviegoers more than an objective film review of a professional film journalist? The answer could be searched by thinking of how our contemporary society works. Instead of the lengthy and challenging writings on films, we tend to listen to or read the words of those who formulate their opinions in a simple and easily understandable manner. What is more, those film consumers who watch movies for entertainment purposes all too often do not care about the artistic or cinematic values the cinematic production might (or might not) contain. Most of the American moviegoers today simply feel satisfied reading a two-word long comment about their soon-to-be-watched film from their fellow film consumer who is not getting paid for their words. As Zoltán Dragon points out, one "can get an alternative life in a digitally created world s/he could only fantasize about previously," (Dragon 2008: 122) which also contributes to the feeling of entertainment and joy when watching a film.

People do not wish to be told what to watch – on the contrary, they seek advice from the ordinary moviegoers whose aim with commenting on the value of a film is to inform other cinephiles whether that film was worth the anticipation, or it was a failure without the uncomfortable feeling of overt analyzation or the usage of uneasy expressions.

6. In-depth film criticism is not cancelled

Despite the sympathy for short-form reviews, contemporary in-depth film criticism is still present both in the print and in online media. Cinephiles who are interested in movies can still find their ways among superficial film comments and reviews. Books on film continue to be published, both in printed and in online form, which makes it easier for people to access them. Magazines like *The New Yorker* (1925) still offer film review articles written by professionals both on their online and printed platforms.

In fact, many film critics changed their chosen medium when discussing films and still, persisted to exhaustive analyses. Sharing a movie review in the form of a video has arguably become a preferred means of film criticism in the past 10 years – which can also be connected to the previous success of Ebert’s and Siskel’s film reviewing talkshow. The online video sharing platform Youtube (2005) provides plentiful opportunities for film criticism. Contemporary individual film critics such as Jeremy Jahns or Chris Stuckmann and groups of film reviewers like Cinefix or CinemaSins have their own Youtube channels where they post weekly and daily film reviewing videos. Guy Lodge, film columnist of *The Guardian*, describes video criticism as a versatile form:

[It] enables both serious film scholars and curious film-makers to explore cinema in more idiosyncratic and sensory ways than the written word necessarily permits. (Lodge 2019)

Besides the online video essays, social networking services like the *Letterboxd* (2011) are dedicated to bringing the cinephiles together. Members of *Letterboxd* can use the platform to share their reviews on films and can engage with other cinephiles. Reading reviews on the site is equally free for members and non-members. Furthermore, *Letterboxd* promotes members who gained the most “likes,” which means that a short comment has as much potential to be promoted as a review of professional quality.

Regardless of the growing popularity of the short-form film reviews and comments, the Web 2.0 continuously offers opportunities for both long-form and short-form film criticism to be recognized; it depends on the target audience which form they prefer and choose.

Conclusions

Film criticism is a profession that is constantly changing but will never disappear entirely. The question that remains is not about the disappearance of criticism on film as such but rather about the decreasing/ceasing of the interest in the writings of the professional movie critics.¹ After the widespread availability of the television in the American households, film critics began to experience a competitive source that could take away the attention of their audience. Television provided a new way of looking at films, talking about them for entertainment purposes rather than for educative ones. Still, during the 1960s and 1970s cinephiles in the United States of America were keen to know what professional film critics thought about the movies.

The introduction of the home video added to the shaping of the film reviewing industry, as many movies available on VHS tapes were already known by their box office numbers. Therefore, the marketing value arguably meant more for the public than the criticism the VHS movies had once received. With the recognition of the marketing

¹ The explanation of a possible forming of a binary opposition between professional film critics in the past (long, in-depth) and contemporary outlets (shallow, short) is the objective the paper aims to examine: why professional film critics have less influence on the moviegoers today through the discussion of the most profound differences between professional film criticism of the 1960s-1970s (long-form) and between popular contemporary film reviewing techniques (short-form). The paper, however, does mention the continuous availability of online long-form film criticism and does not claim that contemporary American film criticism is now completely lacking the source of in-depth film reviews and is not aimed at overgeneralizing the “mass” viewers.

potential certain movies held, newspapers from the 1980s changed their film review style and “went soft on” block buster films (Roberts 2010: 399). The new goal was to entertain and not to educate.

The alteration and development of the sources one could use to obtain information about films arrived at another milestone when social media platforms slowly developed into the dominant means of expressing opinions and sharing comments on film not only in the United States of America but also around the globe. This paper concentrated on Twitter, highlighting the capability the platform has to be a potential source of filmic content. The main contrast of the film content posts on Twitter and the professional film criticisms is their usefulness in the marketing process of a motion picture production. It hardly matters for the marketing of a film whether a film critic writes a positive or negative review about it if there are millions of likes, comments and shares on the online platforms dedicated to the same movie.

Talking about film criticism as such today is different from what it meant fifty or sixty years ago for the Americans. Blockbuster movies today mainly have an entertainment function and do not aim to convey deep and insightful messages for the viewer to meditate on later; on the contrary, Hollywood film directors offer a 2-2,5 hour of relaxation and enjoyment for the exhausted citizen through their films. The ideal film review of the 21st century is short, lively, and simple. In this context, film critic Richard Corliss’ perception on the film generation in the 1990s can also be applied to the contemporary moviegoers:

In today’s movie criticism, less is more. Shorter is sweeter. Today’s busy consumers want just the clips [...]. And an opinion that can be codified in numbers, letters, or thumbs. (Corliss 1990)

In this regard, the main outcome of the three paradigm shifts which were introduced in the essay is the complete remodeling of film criticism. Film critics might have to consider moving their reviews to the online platforms such as Twitter so they can cope with the changing

needs of today's film generation. For now, the possibility of choice is still there, the Internet offers the wordy and insightful film critique pieces, often in the form of videoblogs, in the sea of social media posts, comments, film blogs run by self-made critics and the shorter, databased film reviews for those who are interested in film; one just has to care enough to search for them. It is upon us, the film consumers, how the profession will be shaped, whether it will live on, mainly in the form of social media debates and film blogs or if the value of the in-depth movie evaluations will be brought back by popular demand.

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